

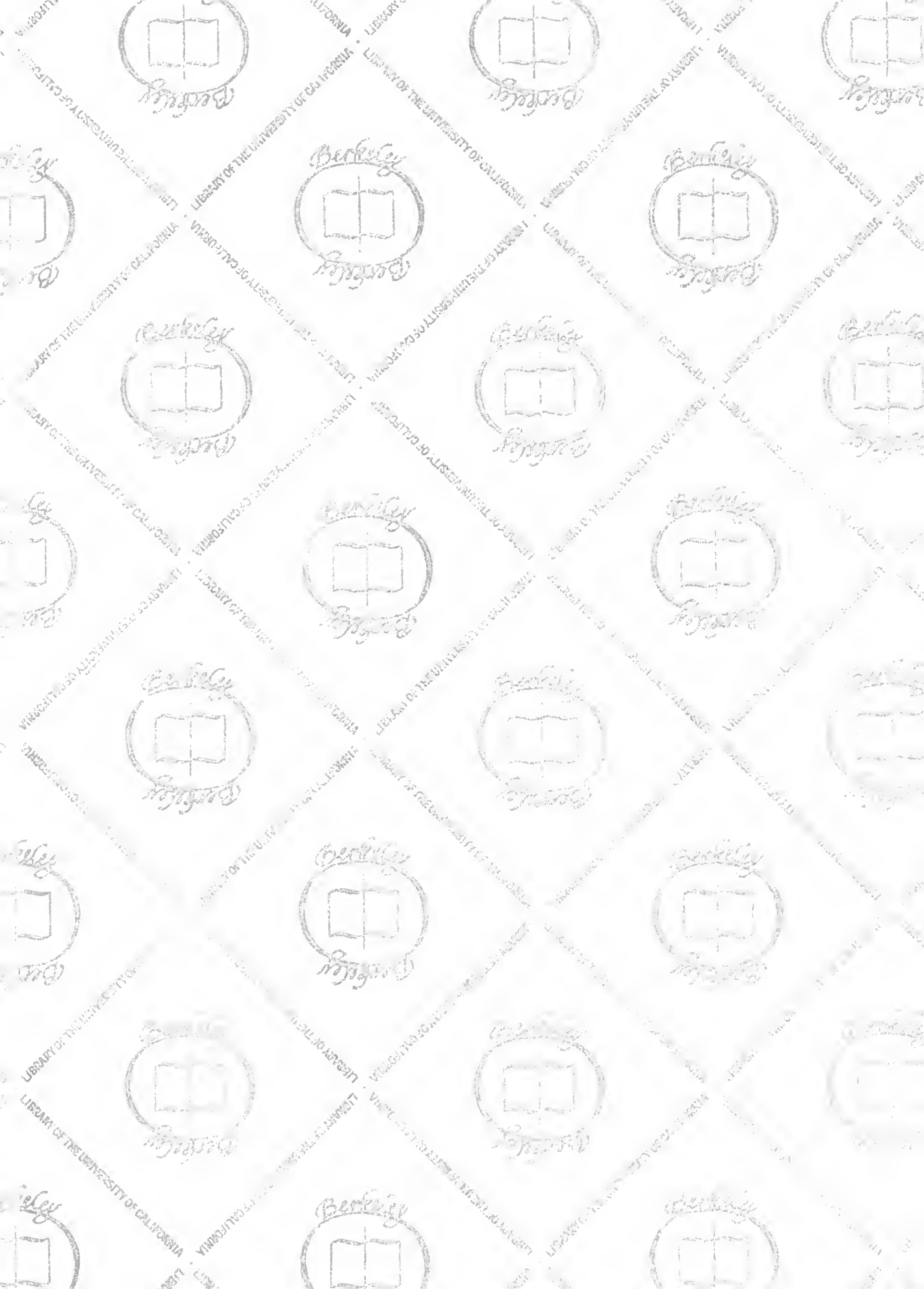
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Books and Printing in the San Francisco Bay Area Series

Valenti Angelo
Arts and Books: A Glorious Variety

With an Introduction by
James D. Hart

A Written Interview Conducted by
Ruth Teiser and Catherine Harroun
1977-79

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Valenti Angelo

San Francisco, 1927

The photograph was taken by his friend Charles Barrett.

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Preface

Books and Printing in the San Francisco Bay Area

The art and business of printing in the San Francisco Bay Area are significant in the history of printing in the United States and have been an integral part of the cultural development of California. This series of interviews with people who have been participants in and observers of the recent history of San Francisco Bay Area printing stems from a 1958 interview by Francis P. Farquhar with Edward DeWitt Taylor. It has been carried forward in the interest of recording details of the movement and analyzing factors in its development.

To the series have been added interviews concerning other related aspects of the San Francisco Bay Area book world: writing, illustrating and designing books, and selling them as well.

The Regional Oral History Office was established to tape record autobiographical interviews with persons prominent in recent California history. The office is under the direction of Willa K. Baum, and under the administration of the Director of The Bancroft Library. Ruth Teiser is project director for the books and printing series.

Books and Printing in the San Francisco Bay Area

Dorothy and Lewis Allen, *Book Printing with the Handpress*
1968 (68 pp.)

Valenti Angelo, *Arts and Books: A Glorious Variety*
1980 (157 pp.)

Brother Antoninus, *Brother Antoninus: Poet, Printer, and Religious*
1966 (97 pp.)

Mallette Dean, *Artist and Printer*
1970 (112 pp.)

Edwin Grabhorn, *Recollections of the Grabhorn Press*
1968 (114 pp.)

Jane Grabhorn, *The Colt Press*
1966 (43 pp.)

Robert Grabhorn, *Fine Printing and the Grabhorn Press*
1968 (129 pp.)

Sherwood and Katharine Grover, *The Grabhorn Press and the Grace
Hoper Press*
1972 (94 pp.)

Carroll T. Harris, *Conversations on Type and Printing, 1967*
1976 (209 pp.)

James D. Hart, *Fine Printers of the San Francisco Bay Area*
1969 (95 pp.)

Quail Hawkins, *The Art of Bookselling: Quail Hawkins and the Sather Gate
Book Shop*
1979 (155 pp.)

Warren R. Howell, *Two San Francisco Bookmen*
1967 (73 pp.)

Haywood Hunt, *Recollections of San Francisco Printers*
1967 (53 pp.)

Lawton Kennedy, *A Life in Printing*
1968 (211 pp.)

Oscar Lewis, *Literary San Francisco*
1965 (151 pp.)

David Magee, *Bookselling and Creating Books*
1969 (92 pp.)

Walter Mann, *Photoengraving, 1910-1969*
1973 (90 pp.)

Bernhard Schmidt, Herman Diedrichs, Max Schmidt, Jr.,
The Schmidt Lithograph Company, Volume I
1968 (238 pp.)

Lorenz Schmidt, Ernest Wuthmann, Stewart Norris, *The Schmidt
Lithograph Company, Volume II*
1969 (157 pp.)

Albert Sperisen, *San Francisco Printers, 1925-1965*
1966 (91 pp.)

Jack W. Stauffacher, *A Printed Word Has Its Own Measure*
1969 (107 pp.)

Edward DeWitt Taylor, *Supplement to Francis P. Farquhar interview*
1960 (45 pp.)

Adrian Wilson, *Printing and Book Designing*
1966 (108 pp.)

October 1980

Introduction

An informal address delivered by James D. Hart on the occasion of Valenti Angelo's eightieth birthday at the San Francisco Public Library, June 23, 1977.

We are here to celebrate and to honor a happy occasion: the eightieth birthday of Valenti Angelo. Valenti's birth took place in a small Tuscany town in the foothills of the Apennines. In the magnificent book that he first printed to record his life and works in 1970 and that was reissued in a far larger format by The Book Club of California last year, Valenti tells us that on the day after his birth he was left in the care of a very religious woman who, to protect him from the devil, took a large wooden crucifix from a far wall and hung it directly over his cradle. From this near perch it crashed, and the elders who came rushing in declared it was a miracle that he was still alive. He himself simply said: "Be that as it may, dear reader, I am alive. But since that day I have never been the same."

Well, Valenti Angelo has been the same ever since I've known him: warm, witty, enthusiastic, and a wonderful artist. I met him for the first time just about fifty years ago. He would then have been thirty, but to me he seemed a lot older than he does now. The spread between our ages was apparently greater in the 1920s. I met him because I was the editor of my high school yearbook and I was hoping to make it more handsome than it had been under previous editors. Since my father was a member of The Book Club of California, I saw its publications as they came into the house and was impressed by them. For my high school annual, therefore, I fudged some borders out of a Kelmscott volume, and in addition I sought out the artist who had illustrated some Book Club books with a feeling for the early Renaissance, since I had pretentiously determined, as I put it in the Foreword, "To give the annual a medieval theme which serves to remind us how far down the path of progress we have traveled."

I found that the artist for The Book Club publications was named Valenti Angelo and that he worked for some kind of a printing firm called The Grabhorn Press, located on Powell Street just above Sutter. I took myself there and somehow persuaded Valenti to do a few decorative illustrations for the Spring 1928 issue of what was called the *Menlo Musketeer*.

I am deeply hurt that these are not in his bibliography, nor is the portrait of Mark Twain that he drew for me the next year to serve as frontispiece of my first printed pamphlet. But at least I know I have some very rare Valenti Angelo items for which other collectors will search in despair.

Better than that, I have some wonderful recollections. Valenti was kindness itself to a very callow high school student as I hung around the press, surreptitiously learning what I could about printing, and admiring his remarkable illustrations which he hand-colored and illuminated with a certainty as remarkable as the *brio* that also characterized them. Possessed of a taste and the talent that smacked of his Renaissance forebears, Valenti had also the dedication of a medieval monk creating magnificent marginal illustrations and lettering for a Book of Hours.

Who else but Valenti Angelo could combine the artistic fluency and the devoted persistence that makes *The Voiage and Travaile of Sir John Maundevile* one of the great products of modern fine printing? In addition to its thirty-one illustrations, each copy has thirty-four hand-illuminated initials in red, blue and gold. All are done freestyle, each is different from the other. Think of it: one hundred and fifty copies, each graced by thirty-four initials, each initial decorated in three colors, in other words, 15,500 examples of hand-drawing and hand-coloring! To these beautiful initials were added any number of graceful paragraph marks scattered through the thick volume. This was what could be achieved with the vibrant energies of a thirty-year old man (The book was published just two days after Valenti had his thirty-first birthday.)

Time has shown us that what he could do in youth, Valenti can still do at an older age. Only last week did he deliver to The Bancroft Library one of the extra-colored copies of the new book by and about him issued by The Book Club. The hand that made the coloring is as secure, and the eye that determined the coloring is as bright as ever they were just about fifty years ago.

During that intervening half-century, Valenti has created any number of other beautiful books, some of which he has designed, some of which he has illustrated and decorated, and some of which he has printed himself. They possess a glorious variety and yet they all have certain qualities of beauty and taste and character that mark them as coming from the same source. Then too Valenti has been the author as well as the illustrator, designer, and printer of books. Almost forty years ago Valenti wrote his first book, *Nino*, based upon his own youth and his family background in Tuscany. Its success led to other books, also growing

out of his own experience, narrating in lovely anecdotal style the lives of Italians in America, particularly in San Francisco.

For many years, Valenti made his life and earned his living away from his second-home city of San Francisco. Fortunately we now have him back with us again. During those long years of absence he was never entirely gone because we could read his books so appealing to the childhood experiences we all cherish, or enjoy the beautifully printed and wonderfully illustrated works he continued to create. What we couldn't have, that we are now privileged to possess once again, is Valenti himself. How good to have here in San Francisco that lovely, gentle, talented, humorous, and kindly man, ever possessed of the spirit of youth. I am happy to have been here today to say these few words of reminiscence, appreciation, and good wishes on this, the eightieth birthday of Valenti Angelo.

James D. Hart
Director, The Bancroft Library

23 June 1977
Berkeley, California

Interview History — Valenti Angelo

The invitation to participate in an autobiographical reminiscence was sent to Valenti Angelo on February 7, 1977, and almost two years later to the day, the interview was ready for final typing. Because of difficulty in speaking resulting from an operation that Mr. Angelo mentions in the interview, questions were asked and answers given in writing. Following preliminary discussions, the first set of questions went to him in April, 1977, and he wrote out in his own hand his answers and returned them several weeks later. Thereafter, at intervals of several weeks, more sets of questions went to him and were answered similarly. Conferences concerning them were held from time to time. Frequently Mr. Angelo's answers would suggest other questions, some asking simply for fuller explanations or more details about certain matters. These were inserted into the text. In some cases, this procedure caused some discontinuity of the chronology; subject matter took precedence over sequence in the final text given here.

The handwritten material was typed and checked over by Mr. Angelo. The interviewer and Catherine Harroun edited the interview, making changes only where spelling or clarity demanded. The attempt was to avoid interfering with Mr. Angelo's style which here, as in his books, remains individual and charming. It is an excellent reflection of the man as he is and as he has been described by James D. Hart.

Various friends of Valenti Angelo aided the interview through suggesting lines of inquiry and giving of information. Mrs. Gaye L. Kelly, executive secretary of The Book Club of California, was extremely helpful.

Mr. Angelo is, as he indicates at the conclusion of this interview, writing his full autobiography for publication.

This manuscript has been formatted and typeset on the University's UNIX computer operating system. This has been done as part of an experiment by the Regional Oral History Office to introduce the use of the computer into our editing and manuscript production routines. The program for the format was

written by Joan Annett. The system of computer editing and the execution of the format program was done by Marie Herold and Cheryl Ishida.

Ruth Teiser
Interviewer-Editor

25 August 1979
Regional Oral History Office
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Childhood in Italy

TEISER: When and where were you born? What was the city nearest your village?

ANGELO: I was born June 23, 1897, in the village of Massarosa on the foothills of the Apennine mountains in the Province of Tuscany, Italy. The nearest city was Lucca, and another was the famous Italian Riviera and summer resort Viareggio on the western coast of the Ligurian Sea.

TEISER: What were the names of your parents? What was your father's occupation?

ANGELO: My mother's name was Viclinda Checchi Angelo. My father, Augustino Angelo, worked in the nearby marble quarries, and at times helped to harvest crops, such as olives, corn and rice, which was the livelihood of the peasants in that region. According to my mother he also worked for a time in a paper mill at Pescia, a small village on the Serchio River which flows between Massarosa and the ancient city of Lucca.

It has been recorded in the city of Lucca archives of Tuscany, that my ancestors were from Florence. Some of them were artist-craftsmen employed in the building of that city.

TEISER: Do you know anything further about your ancestors who were Florentine craftsmen, and what kind of work they did?

ANGELO: One in particular worked at constructing mosaics. Some were stone masons and carpenters.

TEISER: Was either of your parents interested in books and the arts?

ANGELO: My mother, who was the oldest of five children in the Checchi family, was perhaps the best educated. She studied at the convent, as did most village girls, and was taught by the nuns. There, besides grammar and arithmetic, they were also taught to do needlepoint, lace work, and weave linen on the loom. She was very artistic and, as I remember, created several beautiful tablecloths and laces which were sold to the village merchant and to merchants in nearby cities.

I remember her reading to me stories such as *Pinocchio* and from illustrated fables and often from the Bible.

As for my father, he was what one might term as a jack-of-all-trades. My early memories of him are rather dim as I was only five years old when he left the village for South America.

TEISER: Were you the eldest child? What other children were there in your family who were born in Italy? (Please give names, dates of birth, and brief later history of each.)

ANGELO: In our family I was the oldest child. Then there was Silvio, born 1898. My sister Jesuwalda (or Jessie) was born 1901. My brother Vincenzo (or Vincent) was born 1903.

Silvio was the only one who graduated from high school. Wanted to become a race car driver, later worked in Bethlehem Steel Corp., learned the trade there of constructing molds for castings. Later, in 1928, became a prize fighter, finally married and had two children. He died of lung cancer in 1965.



THE ANGELO FAMILY - ANTIOCH, CALIFORNIA, 1909.

Left to right, back row: Jessie, Viclinda Angelo [mother], Augustino Angelo [father], Valenti;
center row: John and Vincent; *front row:* Joseph and Silvio.

My sister Jessie had a grammar school education. She married at a very young age. She was a beautiful person and died of consumption, 1921.

My brother Vincent was the most restless of all in the family. He quit school and, unknown to members of his family, joined the Navy. It was six months before we received word that he was somewhere in China, serving as seaman on a U.S. destroyer. It was during the World War (World War II), I think. He was later in Hawaii during the Japanese attack. He won many honors for bravery during his time in the service. He was finally retired, married, and lived in Antioch. Both he and his wife were killed in an automobile accident following a trip from Mexico. The only survivors: two Mexican Chihuahua dogs and three cases of whiskey.

TEISER: About what year did your father go to South America? Why did he go? To which South American country did he go, and what was his occupation there?

ANGELO: My father left Italy in 1904. He went to Sao Paulo, Brazil, to escape military service, as did many other Italians. He was known in the village as somewhat of a rebel. According to my mother, he worked in factories and plantations. I remember that he had an older brother living there who had left the village for the same reason. I think his brother was the reason for his going there. Later my mother received letters from friends that the two brothers had moved north; their intent was to reach California.

My father often told me stories about the hardships he suffered in Brazil. Then a year or so later my mother received a letter from Antioch, California, containing information concerning plans to move his family to the United States—which was finally resolved in 1905.

TEISER: You have described vividly in "An Autobiographical Story"* the illuminated *Book of Hours* which you saw when you were seven. Had you been going to school long by then?

*Valenti Angelo [:] Author, Illustrator, Printer. San Francisco: Book Club of California, 1976, pp. 21-34.

ANGELO: It was during my second year at school, when I was seven years old that I first saw the *Book of Hours* that my teacher was reading. I thought it was the most beautiful book in the world. Later I was privileged to see other books in my teacher's library. His handwriting, too, I recall was different from the ordinary writing. When I look back I realize that he might have been also a calligrapher, as he taught the school children a sort of script writing.

One morning as I walked across the courtyard, I saw my teacher sitting on a bench reading a book. I had seen him there many times before, but on this particular morning there seemed something different about him. As he turned each page of his book, lo and behold, his face seemed brighter than usual and occasionally tiny flashes of light seemed to sparkle around him. I was entranced by the thought that my teacher was possessed of some godlike powers. Surely this was something to investigate. When I reached him, I found that he was reading a book the like of which I had never seen before, a fifteenth century manuscript *Book of Hours*, entirely written and decorated by hand. As he turned each page, each one was embellished with pictures in vivid colors and burnished gold. The sparkles which I had seen as I walked across the courtyard were the sun's reflections on the pages of the manuscript.

My teacher told me how the monks in monasteries throughout Italy kept themselves busy copying and beautifying the text from the holy scriptures.

I think seeing this book had an influence on my work as decorator of books in later years.

Among the memories of my childhood school days at the monastery I recall a garden behind the large structure in which varieties of wild flowers grew. It was edged with olive and chestnut trees and seemed always filled with birds singing and nesting. At one end of the garden there was a large pot-bellied terracotta urn half buried in the ground under the shade of a grape arbor. Its opening, oval-shaped, the size to accommodate one's unspeakable part of the anatomy, was called by the students "The Red Toilet." One sat waiting for nature to perform, meanwhile listening to

the cooing of pigeons and other kinds of feathered friends that made their homes in the olive, fruit and chestnut trees. One sat there longer than was necessary too, often to escape the answers to Brother Bernardo's questions, answers which a student had neglected to learn.

And on hot summer days, amid the humming of bees and flies, there were times when visions and dreams of my future would emerge. And then the presence of the glaring white walls of the monastery would suddenly draw me back to reality. It was a garden I shall long remember. From there one saw the red-roofed village below, the little church and belfry and, far away, the checkered fields that reached to the sea.

One morning my mother and I went to the small piazza in front of the church to witness the re-enactment of the "Miracle of the Ascension." It was performed under a huge tent roof of blue, stuck with tinsel silver stars that represented heaven. The piazza was filled with peasants and merchants all dressed in their finest clothes. Suspended by strings from the tent roof were little angels which seemed to float around in the air.

Upon a throne surrounded by woolly clouds sat God Almighty, with cheerful seraphim all about Him. On one side of the throne sat the Madonna, pale faced with tender features. On the other, Santa Chiara and the sad looking Santo Francesco. The Spirito Santo, a real pigeon, was tied by the leg to the back of the throne, for fear it would take flight and fly away. The people stood entranced by the spectacle as two men hoisted Jesus, who had been newly painted for the occasion, upwards with ropes to his glorious place among the painted clouds at the peak of the tent.

As He rose the little angels swung around Him as though floating on air, their mouths opened wide singing hallelujahs. Up, up He went but most slowly and with pulleys. People stretched their necks, looking up at Jesus and His entourage, emitting "Oh's" and "Ah's."

My mother whispered to me, "Let us hope our dear Lord ascended to heaven faster than that, otherwise He would never have got there."

There were chuckles of joy when at last the Lord reached His heavenly place among the clouds. I remember only too well Father Bellarosa's sermon on that day. To me it had seemed much too long.

In our village the "Miracle of the Ascension" was talked of for many days after.

TEISER: Do you recall the name of the monk who was your teacher? Did he belong to the order that owned the monastery in which the school was held? What did you learn in school there?

ANGELO: Brother Bernardo was the name of my teacher. I don't recall his surname. The school was a large room on the ground floor of the monastery which faced a garden-ed courtyard surrounded by grape arbors and olive and chestnut trees.

The monastery was of the Franciscan Order. It stood on a hillside above the house in which I lived. There I was taught the usual lessons —reading, writing, and arithmetic. There were also intermissions when the children were taught the scripture. Of all the lessons, I liked the drawing lessons best of all.

As I look back I don't think my teacher was a great artist. He was more of a decorative artist. The drawing lessons concerned mostly drawing flowers, fruit, birds and animals. There were times when he took the class up into the hills to gather chestnuts and berries, when in season, which grew in abundance.

Brother Bernardo was a fine teacher, but was very strict about manners and behavior. He was the kindest, most patient teacher I have ever known.

In school we were often reminded of the work and miracles performed by St. Francis of Assisi, a Franciscan monk, a preacher, who was the author, not of great works of art, but of a number of simple sermons he delivered to the common people of his day.

My teacher was also a follower of St. Bernardino, a monk who was born in 1380 at Massa, a village near the village in which I was born. St. Bernardino was the son of a Sienese family, his father being governor of Siena at the time.

Brother Bernardo often read to us segments from *The Fioretti*, known as *The Little Flowers of St. Francis*. And there were times when our kind teacher almost convinced us that in this life there was nothing more noble than to follow the footsteps of the Blessed St. Francis.

I recall a day when Julio, a schoolmate, and I decided to become hermits. We knew of a cave high up on the hillside, and went there clothed in knee pants and shirt, with only a piece of cheese and dry crusts of bread, which, in order to convince the Almighty that we were true followers of the saint, fed most of it to some sparrows who had decided to join us in our retreat. We were going to live on berries and mushrooms and whatever else we could find that was eatable.

It was late fall I remember. From the cave we could see the full moon moving between massive clouds, changing the smoke from the village chimneys from gray to red. There were moments of melancholy conversation, and as the night advanced the wind grew stronger. The loud twittering of birds and the chirping of insects lessened. We too, had less to talk about.

Julio and I had neglected to bring matches. It was growing cold and we moved further back into the cave.

"Brother Bernardo is going to be very proud of us," Julio spoke softly, then added, "we were stupid to forget the matches, weren't we?"

I did not answer and began to contemplate the folly of two young boys trying to become monks. It was all right for Brother Bernardo to be one. He was a grown man. Besides, if I spent the night away from home, my mother would be frantic. My brother Silvio wouldn't mind. We never got along together too well. The more I thought of our folly the more convinced I became that we must immediately return to the village. Julio argued against it. "You'll see. Brother Bernardo

will be proud of us," he insisted.

"It's raining," I said. My words were swallowed by the loud rumble of thunder. I crawled to the entrance of the cave. The raindrops struck the ground like a shower of marbles. The thunder continued, now and then lightning lit up the cloud-laden sky, and I knew it was hopeless to attempt our escape from the cave.

What a marvelous period in my life, when I innocently and seriously dreamed of a future filled with glorious events, perhaps even as a friar going about the countryside repeating, as did my teacher, Brother Bernardo, the theory that to be humble was the best thing in one's life.

By some miracle Julio and I reached the village, our clothes in tatters, our knees and hands bruised, and drenched to our skins. My mother, though very angry, told me that Julio and I were very fortunate to have escaped the ordeal alive: "You might have been struck by lightning."

My school education at the monastery took a course for the better. In the absence of my father, my aunts and uncles had counseled my mother about what kind of education I should be given. My uncle Vincent insisted that I be sent to Pietrasanta to a general school. My aunt Corrina said, "A boy with an angelic face like that should be enrolled at the Franciscan monastery. The boy is very clever with his drawing, but he's always late to school and what is more, to catechism. And he knows practically nothing about religion."

On such matters concerning my education I had little to say. My fate was finally determined by what my grandfather said. "The boy needs religion. He's artistic. We'll send him to the monastery school."

In time I became an altar boy. I was privileged to serve at the altar where Father Bellarosa officiated the mass and vespers. In time I learned the ritual quite well. Because Julio was stronger he took care of shifting the heavy missal from one side of the altar to the other. I was given the honor to ring the little bell signaling the rising, standing, kneeling and sitting of the congregation. My mother had tailored a beautiful

laced, white linen cassock and surplice to wear over my clothes during the mass.

Sometime during the mass I served Father Bellarosa wine from a small decanter into a golden chalice which he held in both his hands, faced the congregation, raised it high over his head all the while chanting the litany, then suddenly placed the chalice to his lips and drained it. I recall Father Bellarosa was very fond of wine. He was kept well supplied with the finest vintage produced in that region of Tuscany.

One day, just before service, I discovered that Julio had been drinking the sacrament wine. I could smell it on his breath and told him it was a sin to drink the wine that represented the sacred blood of our Lord. I was even more surprised when he offered me some. I refused it and told him he would have to confess his sin to Father Bellarosa. Instead of being ashamed of his sin, Julio said, "The wine tastes even better with the communion wafers. Try them. They are the best I ever tasted."

"Oh, Julio," I said, "if Father Bellarosa finds out he will be very angry." It must have been that the devil had entered the church that day because I too became a sinner. Perhaps it was because of my close association with Julio, who was the best friend that I ever had, that I fell from grace.

It happened on an afternoon while Julio and I were sweeping the church. It was hot and humid. Julio kept complaining of thirst. After the third time he returned from behind the altar, the odor of wine on his breath was very strong. He also seemed more jovial and more active than he generally was. His broom blew up great clouds of dust as he swept under the pews. And he seemed to be in a hurry to complete the task. Then suddenly he stopped sweeping, stood the broom against a bench and disappeared behind the altar.

I followed. There he was drinking wine from a gallon jug. "Oh, Julio!" I said.

It was at that moment that I discovered the black cassock and the face of Father Bellarosa standing behind an arched doorway leading to the sacristy. I stuttered, "Julio, Julio. It's, it's. . ." Then the priest

emerged from the shadows and stood before us. His face was very stern.

I tried to speak but instead kept swallowing my tongue.

Father Bellarosa didn't seem angry at all. In fact he stood there smiling rather devilishly.

Julio spoke first. He said, "Father, we have been working very hard. The church is all cleaned up. And. . ."

"All right, you two, come with me," he said. Picking up the jug of wine Father Bellarosa escorted us into his study. Julio and I sat down on a bench beneath a large painting of the Crucifixion that was darkened with age so that the images appeared ghost-like. Only the body of the Christ seemed to catch the light from a window that faced a garden.

I watched the priest as he fingered his rosary. His face too, in the dim light of his study, seemed ghost-like. His lips moved in silence. I had begun to tremble. And I'm certain that Julio, too, was experiencing the pangs a sinner, I imagined, must experience on entering the gate of Hell.

Finally Father Bellarosa stood up. He left the study and returned holding two empty glasses. He picked up the demijohn and filled them with wine. Without further explanation he handed a glass to me and the other to Julio. "Drink!" he said. There was a tone to his voice that frightened me.

He sat quietly watching us sipping the wine as though it was poison. "Drink," he ordered.

We drank and he refilled the glasses. Three times the glasses were refilled. It was during the fifth glass that I began to feel a strange sensation like riding on a merry-go-round that was moving in all sorts of circles. After the sixth glass, I vomited most of the wine on the only carpet in the study. Julio had slowed up considerably but he kept drinking. The priest said not a word. He picked up the soiled wine-stained rug and went out the door and returned. Quickly he refilled our glasses. "Drink. Drink."

"There's only one or two glasses left in the jug," I thought. I hope he doesn't refill the jug. I could see Julio's face. An impish grin lit up his face after each swallow of wine. Once he tried to stand up and fell down. Julio was getting very intoxicated. Suddenly he stood up and, glaring pitifully at the priest, dashed out the door leading to the garden. I could hear him retching violently. He returned staggering, wiping his mouth. His eyes were the color of two overripe strawberries. He sat down.

The jug was empty. Father Bellarosa slowly delivered the greatest sermon on good and evil that I had ever heard. In the end he blessed us.

Julio and I staggered all the way home. At the mention of wine, Julio and I were sick all over again. To this day, every time I drink wine, visions of Julio and I and the village priest return vividly to mind.

Early Interest in Art

TEISER: How old were you, do you recall, when you started drawing?

ANGELO: As I recall, and, according to my parents, I started drawing at a very early age. I do remember some of my first attempts at making pictures. One of my earliest attempts at interior decoration resulted in a sound spanking for some imaginary images executed on the white-washed walls of the house in which I was born. I was about four years of age.

After that I was allowed to draw only on paper. It seemed quite natural for me to draw. Also I was often chastised for soiling my clothes, modeling animals from mud puddles. One of my earliest recollections was that of cutting scallops on a new pair of knee pants which my mother had tailored for Sunday wear to church. I'll never forget the execution of that work of art.

TEISER: Was your family encouraging about your drawings?

ANGELO: It was my mother's father who had travelled throughout Tuscany who encouraged me in my early attempts at drawing. I remember well the names of famous Italian artists of the Renaissance, Leonardo da Vinci, Botticelli, et cetera. However, to him, Michaelangelo was the greatest of them all.

In the town of Siena I was impressed by the great cathedral, and the abundant use of gold on many of the religious altarpieces there, which I learned later were executed by the hand of Lorenzetti, who was well known for his excessive use of gold. In fact, I have been told that because of this, Siena has been often called the golden city.

TEISER: Were your early drawings influenced by the paintings decorating your village church?

ANGELO: I think the paintings in the village church had considerable influence on my later work as painter, sculptor and illustrator. The paintings were unlike the average small, square pictures one frequently sees in the average church. The church was decorated with frescos depicting scenes from the Stations of the Cross. These were painted between arches on each side wall supporting the church structure. They seemed enormous in size, the figures almost life-size. I never tired of seeing them. I must also mention the domed ceiling above the altar. It was a dense, lapis blue, studded with gold stars, among which little angels, dressed in white seemed to whirl joyously around and around in the night sky.

TEISER: Were there other influences? Do you recall the name of the village woodcarver and painter who was interested in your work?

ANGELO: There were other influences. One that stands out very early in my life was a visit to Pisa with my grandfather. The sight of the Leaning Tower, the circular baptistry, the huge white marble cathedral, all made a vivid impression on me. The enormous murals of "The Construction of the Tower of Babel," executed in frescos by Benozzo Gozzoli, in 1468, along with other

historical scenes from the Bible in the Campo Santo building also were impressions that stay with me to this day.

It was the woodcarver and painter who had a shop on the village square who helped to steer my course toward the arts. He was known to the villagers as Jacobo the cabinetmaker. But he also spent considerable time painting religious pictures. Saints and madonnas were his specialty. He was very good at carving floral pattern designs on hardwood, such as oak, chestnut, and walnut wood.

TEISER: Did he simply allow you to work in his shop or did he actually instruct you?

ANGELO: I was allowed to work in his shop and spent considerable time there after school. He was a friend of the family. He would give me pencil and paper and ask me to draw anything that came to mind. "To be an artist one must also be an inventor," he would say. How well I remember those words. "Do it over and over again. And always do your best." He was a very different person than my school teacher, Brother Bernardo, who was very stern and strict with the students. Jacobo was more like my grandfather. He was patient, kind and gentle.

TEISER: What kind of art work did you do there?

ANGELO: Naturally, I soon found myself imitating his work, or trying to. Sometimes he would allow me to fill in a background of red on a painting depicting a mother and child. The Mary holding the Christ child was always dressed in blue, the child in white. The part I liked best was when he would apply gold leaf to the halos. "Don't breathe!" he would say. "There!" To me, old Jacobo the cabinetmaker was not only a great artist—in the manner in which he worked, in whatever medium—he was also a great magician.

In art the Tuscan genius has always been pre-eminent; for the Tuscans have devoted to all the various branches of art more labor and study than all the other Italian peoples.

TEISER: Which of your grandfathers did you go to live with? What was his occupation? Was he interested in art? Did he encourage your art work?

ANGELO: After my father left the village and went to Brazil, we moved from a small house in the lowland to a three-story stone dwelling on a hill above the church on the village square. It was the house of my mother's father. The property was surrounded by olive and chestnut trees, and some vineyards. I remember the view of the lowlands and the checkered fields of rice and corn, all divided by canals. And, on a clear day, the seaside city of Viareggio could be seen, edged by the sparkling water of the Ligurian Sea.

My grandfather also owned land below the village which he farmed. He was also an olive oil merchant, was well educated and travelled a great deal, selling his products. He was a very close friend of Jacobo the painter and cabinetmaker, and was interested in art.

The time was drawing near for my departure for America. I look back and often reflect on the time spent at the home of my grandfather after my father left the village to go to Brazil. It was known to all the villagers as "Casa Checchi."

To me, to this day, it is more than a house. It is the memories it holds. It is the stories it can tell. Stories of feasts and famine. Stories of all who have entered, stayed, experienced companionship and the friendships that have passed on from one relative to another. The dreams, the joys, the sorrows, laughter and tears. The quarrels and acts of forgiveness. The laughter and cries of babes, the words of mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters, cousins and uncles and aunts and nieces. The generations past are imprinted there. On the surface of the dwelling, time itself can be seen.

The house was three stories high. Its age is marked by the color of stones—gray, yellow, covered a little with lichen and pale green with moss. But the garden below, green with flowers in spring bloom and new foliage, lends joy to the aged dwelling.

The house, I was told, was erected during the early part of the fourteenth century. I have been told it is one of the many houses built there because of the

nearby marble quarries, which at the time supplied marble for use in construction as well as for artistic purposes by famous sculptors. It has been said the great Michaelangelo worked there.

TEISER: When your grandfather took you to visit famous cities of northern Italy, did he especially take you to see works of art? Do you recall those that particularly impressed you? Did you become interested at all in doing mural decorations? Sculpture?

ANGELO: Whenever my grandfather took me with him to various cities he always managed to find time to show me works of art, either those in churches or those in museums. The Uffizi galleries in Florence made the greatest impression on me. Never had I seen so many paintings and sculptures stored in one place before. It was a dazzling experience just to see the city of Florence, and its many palaces and great architecture. I shall never forget the great church there, Santa Maria dei Fiori, with the Giotto tower. All appeared to me like a huge multicolored jewel.

I think it was during the Pan-American World's Fair in San Francisco [Panama-Pacific International Exposition] in 1915 that I became interested in the art of sculpture and mural painting. However nothing came out of my studies at that time, for I was occupied in making a living.

I started sculpting during the thirties, while I was employed at the Grabhorn Press. At that time several pieces of sculpture in stone, wood, ceramics and bronze were executed for various clients. It was in the early thirties that I also started painting in earnest. I had several exhibitions at that time, and received some recognition from the local art critics. I was included in group exhibitions at the de Young and Palace of the Legion of Honor.

From Tuscany to the American West

TEISER: You have written that you came to America in 1905. Would you describe the trip to New York? (Did you sail from Genoa?) Most Italians who came to the United States in that period had a difficult trip and a confusing arrival; did your family have this experience?

ANGELO: It was a day in March 1905 that plans for our departure for America were completed. I recall the excitement, and the preparations for the long journey. I was about eight years old then. The day was a memorable one indeed. There was quite a procession of village well-wishers that followed the donkey cart carrying us and our possessions to the little station in the marshes, on the outskirts of the village. It was always a great event when a family left the village for America.

My mother's brother was to join us. He was a jolly, lively lad, who played a guitar. Many relatives came to see us off. Brother Bernardo and some of my schoolmates were there. There was merriment, laughter and tears. The village priest came to bless us, to wish us a safe and happy journey, and reminded us that no matter what happened, always to have faith in Our Lord.

The train was made up of a series of compartments, with doorways on one side of each car. I had been on the train before on trips with my grandfather and was well acquainted with its small interiors. My mother called them "sardine boxes." With all our luggage, which consisted of linen bundles, suitcases, and wicker baskets, the place resembled a storage closet.

The port of Genoa, from which we would embark to America, lay north of our village. I recall the emotional strain on all of us as the train pulled out of the little station. The journey seemed endless, the scenery along the route, ever-changing. Now steep cliffs, glimpses of the sea shimmering under the noonday sun. The train sped through tunnels, along the edges of steep cliffs, through orchards and cultivated fields, with often a glimpse of the Apennines stretching along the horizon, where beyond lay the mighty Alps.

The sun hung low over the western sea-drenched horizon as the train pulled into a huge, smoke-stained iron structure. We had arrived in Genoa.

The night was spent with relatives. Early on the following day we stood in line on a dock beside a huge vessel, the like I had seen only in pictures. There were carabinieri in gold-braided, green uniforms, wearing shining swords and plumed Napoleonic hats, some with huge mustaches, and all looking very serious.

We were tired of standing. Papers had to be examined and approved, questions answered. "Pass on." The strong odor of disinfectant and paint was new to my nostrils. My mother and my Uncle Vincent, heavily loaded with luggage, struggled up the steep incline that led to the upper deck of the vessel. It was already crowded with men, women and children, all who amid their belongings awaited further instructions. An occasional blast from a departing freighter making its way out of the harbor echoed loud and long in the morning air. There seemed no end of waiting. The upper deck had become more and more crowded. It was noon by the time the ordeal of loading the ship ended. There was a constant babble of voices of the young and the old, the loudest from babies crying for their noonday meal.

We were herded below deck into the hold of the ship, known as steerage. Fourteen days of misery, misapprehension, weeping, retching, moaning and the pitiful wailing of infants. I was seasick most of the time during the voyage. The only view of the world outside the large room was a porthole, which seemed most of the time under water. It was a relief when the immigrants had their meals on deck. We were served ship food in large tin cups, a thick soup consisting of rice, vegetables and ground meat, known as minestrone. And during clear weather when the ocean was less turbulent, music and laughter was heard and young people danced the tarantella.

The vessel docked at Naples to take on more passengers. The next stop was Palermo, where great quantities of oranges and lemons in crates were stored in the hold. The days dragged on.

As we neared the American coast I saw an enormous white mountain floating in a calm sea and was told it was an iceberg. On the following morning the vessel, *Lepanto*, lay at anchor beneath the shadow of the Statue of Liberty in New York harbor.

Four more days of bewilderment and pandemonium. Going through customs at Ellis Island is an event I shall never forget. After being thoroughly insulted and deloused with hair clippers and medical spray, and our entry papers re-examined, we were admitted to the Promised Land. It all seemed an endless nightmare to me at the time. Finally a relative of our family—an uncle, I think, who lived in New York and spoke the American language—arrived on the scene. And I remember my mother as she wept with joy. I cried too. I felt that at last there was one person in the world that cared for us. Meanwhile, my uncle Vincent played a lively tune on his guitar.

TEISER: What were your first impressions of New York? How long did you stay there? What was it like staying there?

ANGELO: A ferry boat, the like of which I'd never seen, carried us from Ellis Island to New York City. I recall the tall buildings and strange architecture. The hustle and bustle of the people, the many different kinds of horse-drawn trucks and carriages, and, above all, the language of the people. There were no gardens nor mountains to be seen.

In an overloaded, overcrowded horse-drawn delivery wagon we finally arrived on Bleecker Street, the center of the Italian quarter of New York City. The street was crowded with vendors. Laundry hung like banners strung across the noisy street.

We lived in a crowded tenement building for about six weeks, awaiting passage money from my father who was then living in Antioch, California.

During my stay there my brother Silvio and I spent considerable time exploring the neighborhood. Once we walked as far uptown as Central Park. And there were many days that I yearned to be back again in Massarosa, among my kind of people. The children here seemed so different than those I had known in

my native land. They were noisy, ill-mannered and unfriendly.

TEISER: Would you describe your trip from New York to Antioch?

ANGELO: My journey across the United States was hard on all of us. But the thought of seeing my father helped me to endure some of the difficulties during the long journey, which took about seven days. It was a start-and-stop journey as my mother called it. None of us had had a tub bath in what to me seemed years—and my clothes were beginning to stick to my skin. The railroad chair car was overcrowded with immigrants. (I learned later that the year 1905 was a record year for immigrants to America.) We had brought bread, salami and cheese. Sometimes, at station stops, my mother would buy food from vendors who passed through the passenger cars. One day my mother bought a whole broiled chicken, and a real Sunday celebration was made out of that meal.

There were times when the crowded car reminded me of being back in steerage. I remember falling asleep sitting upright in a tight corner of the coach seat. Others slept on each others' laps. And as the train sped westward, and the night lights were on low, the wailing cries of babes in arms was heard amid the sounds of snoring of tired passengers, and the occasional sound of the train whistle could be heard.

One morning the conductor came rushing into the car shouting, "Chicago! Chicago! Chicago! Everybody change trains for Omaha!" Everyone could be heard repeating the words "Chicago, Omaha!" as though they had a special meaning. We piled out of the car, each carrying his share of baggage into a crowded station.

There were interpreters and train ticket examiners. We sat on benches waiting for instructions. All of us had identification tags fastened on our clothes. The place appeared like a huge cathedral, filled with people murmuring prayers. We waited and waited. Meantime my brothers and my sister and my uncle had a real feast of peanuts and popcorn, all washed down with a bottle of sarsaparilla—a drink I

had discovered during our historical stay at Ellis Island. My mother, meanwhile, sat quietly through it all, smiling, holding her rosary beads.

It was afternoon when we boarded the train for Omaha. The immigrants were happy to be on their way. It was a slow train, without red plush seats and elegant interior. Everything about this one appeared old, the seats hard and torn, the windows soot-stained, and as it moved out of the station and gained speed it made such a racket everyone had to shout to be heard. I found it difficult to see the scenery as we rattled along. The train was a local. After two days of discomfort we reached Omaha.

The prairie city of Omaha has been embedded in my mind to this day because of a strange occurrence that took place there during my journey to California. The passengers, mostly immigrants, after a long delay were transferred to cattle cars. Some of the more fortunate immigrants had the luxury of being consigned to closed box cars.

Among the many questions asked concerning the change in transportation, no one received an answer. We were immigrants. "We're doing all we can to get you people to California," roared the railroad conductors, the brakemen, the engineers. "This way." They helped us into a cattle car. My mother hung onto her rosary beads, my uncle to his guitar. Some of the passengers kept quiet. Others protested. Babies cried. My uncle deplored the situation and the railroad system of America. Meantime he sat in the cattle car and took good care of his precious guitar.

It was a journey I will always remember. It was early spring. The landscape was barren and much of it was flat. None of it resembled any landscape I had seen in my native land.

The nights were cold, everybody huddled together like sheep in a corral. My sister was sick. I had a bad cough. The freight train sped on. My mother prayed endlessly. Everybody in the car complained. "We'll be lucky if we ever reach California." Some said, "If this is first class travel, I wonder what third class would be like." Most of the immigrants had brought a supply of staple foods. Some had flasks of

wine. I remember a day when the train stopped at a white station in the desert. I saw strange looking people all dressed in colored blankets. My mother told me that they were American Indians. They were selling baskets and colored beads.

We crossed yellow and snow-white deserts and lush green rolling hills. The train passed through canyons, alongside of rugged mountains, through tunnels and across lakes.

One morning the train stopped at a railroad junction. (I don't recall the name of the station. It might have been Barstow.) Some of the immigrants said we had reached California. And soon the name was on everyone's lips.

The immigrants were transferred from the freight cars back to a passenger train. My mother was puzzled by the emblem painted on the side of the cars. It was a cross within a circle, and read SANTA FE. She knew the names of most saints. But this saint was one she had never heard of. In Los Angeles we boarded a train that would take us to our destination. On the following morning we reached the little town of Antioch, California, which is situated on the San Joaquin River, in Contra Costa County, California.

Antioch, California

TEISER: What were your first impressions of Antioch?

ANGELO: A strange incident occurred on my arrival at the station in Antioch. I chuckle over it every time it comes to mind.

There were three boys loitering at the station. One of them, the oldest, dressed in blue denim overalls, ran up to me, spoke one word, "Dago," grinned, and without another word punched me in the eye. Suddenly, all three disappeared. My mother was furious. My uncle tried to find them. Suddenly my father arrived in a horse-drawn wagon. After that, confusion filled the morning air. Everyone laughed and wept at the same time. My mother kept saying to us, "Smile, smile, smile! That's your father. Don't you

remember him?"

My father embraced us all. I can still hear his words. "Oh, day of days. I thank God that we are all together again." I did not recognize him. His face seemed different to that I remembered on the day he left the country. It was the long drooping mustache that puzzled me, and he seemed younger too.

My eye had begun to swell, and I knew that soon I would have (what I learned later) Americans call "a big shiner."

My father drove us around the town. Like most western towns in California, Antioch was no exception. It was filled with scenes I would later see in western movies. Main Street was unpaved with rows of merchandise stores, a three story hotel, the Arlington, with a corniced false front, a raised wooden front porch running the length of it, where old cronies, Spanish and Civil War veterans, sat all day chewing tobacco, engaged in spitting contests. There were several hitching posts too, and water troughs for out-of-town farmers.

I remember Tom Shine, the town sheriff, a six foot giant who wore a Stetson hat with a dried rattlesnake skin band around its crown, two six shooters in decorated leather holsters which hung against his knee-high cowhide boots. I recall seeing him always in the act of either entering a saloon or staggering out of it. There were about six saloons in the town. And on a hot, windy summer day, little whirlwinds of yellow dust decorated the streets of Antioch. During winter Main Street became a swamp.

Vineyards and orchards and farms reminded me of my native land. Especially impressive was Mount Diablo, with its foothills just turning blue and gold with lupine and poppies. Meadowlarks and red-winged black birds were in abundance. Across the San Joaquin River lay the uncultivated fertile Delta, later to become a part of the breadbasket of California and help sustain us.

The home my father had rented was a large, unpainted, batten and board monstrosity. It stood in the lowland west of the town. (I later learned it had been a house of ill fame.)

I still remember the strange odor of cosmetics and other peculiar odors. Because of winter floods, the house had been built high off the ground. It was near a paper mill on the edge of the river. There was a windmill, but the water pumped from it contained so much alkali that my father had to cart fresh water from the town's fire hydrants. It was a miserable place to live in. The land became a lake in winter, and in spring a huge forest of wild mustard greens, and the summer sun made a desert of it.

A year after our arrival my father, with the help of neighbors, built a house on higher ground, and a new life began for all of us.

Our new house on high ground was better than the old one in the marshy lowland. It had less bedrooms and three of us boys slept in the attic, which was unfinished. I can remember the strong odor of newly cut lumber. Sometimes there were not enough blankets, so three boys slept in one bed. There was a window, that in the summer looked out upon green, flowered fields and a glimpse of twin-peaked Mount Diablo. But during winter the landscape was painted a frosty white. It was during those cold nights, when the old iron kitchen stove, too, went to sleep, that we shivered. Mother would throw on an old overcoat over the blankets. Of course there was always a quarrel between us as to whose turn it was to sleep in the middle. No one wanted the outer sides of the bed. And I being the oldest seldom got a chance to sleep in the middle.

Mother was small, slender and beautiful. There were times when we looked upon her as queen of the household, and there were times when her tender loving manners turned to fury. "All three of you can't possibly sleep in the middle, you know!" she would say. And just as soon as she left the room the battle for the middle of the bed began again. But when the heavy footsteps of Father were heard along with a voice all of us feared, the commotion would suddenly come to an end.

My little brother Vincent, being the youngest usually won the contest. He shivered so violently, and we felt so sorry for him that we let him sleep between us. Those cold wet winters generally brought on illness

in the family. If one member of the family had a cold, other members of the family were sure to be infected.

My mother always made us wear a necklace of garlic. She believed garlic had the power to prevent colds and more serious afflictions. It was a Tuscan voodoo sort of thing. And, as such being the case, the strong odor of garlic often became for us a protection from the more aggressive, brutal boys on the school grounds—those who had a mean eye for foreigners.

My brother and I kept my mother well stocked with catfish, carp and bass which was plentiful in the San Joaquin River. We also worked in the fruit orchards during harvest time, and gathered driftwood for the big iron cook stove.

We had no gas nor electricity and used kerosene lamps and candles for what seemed a long time before we had electricity in the house. Sometimes we stole coal from the paper mill yard.

We also worked at a nearby slaughter house. We were paid in kind, pork, beef, veal, which helped keep down expenses. It was a ramshackle wooden building that had grayed with age. It stood on a slope on the edge of a creek near the Southern Pacific Railroad tracks on the outskirts of town. It was known as the "Slaughter House."

It was there my brother Silvio and I often worked after school. We helped the butcher clean up the bloody messes after each slaughter. The work was a repulsive, nasty affair and there were times during the hot summers when I almost fainted from the strange, warm stench that followed the cutting open of the carcass, exposing a tangle of its mysterious interior. Though our house was a quarter of a mile away from the building, the stench persisted. The odor from the pig pen was unbearable. And the place was the home of armies of rats and scores of mice. They were to be seen quite often racing about the place.

In a corner of the building there was an old iron bathtub in which lard was made. Beside it were large tin cans which contained various scraps of fat that had been trimmed from the carcasses of steers, hogs, and lambs.

It was lard-making day, I remember. The tub had been filled with fat and a wood fire burned beneath it. Soon an odor like that of meat roasting invaded the atmosphere. It was no time before the rats came out of their hiding places, followed by field mice.

The fat had begun to melt, making soft bubbling sounds.

The butcher made us do all sorts of unfavorable things; chasing rats into the boiling lard was one of the most deplorable. With brooms we chased and drove the rats into the corner and often pushed them into the tub of boiling lard. There were times when I was repulsed by the ordeal and revolted. Then the butcher would threaten to push me into the vat along with the rats. Later, on lard-making days, I dreaded the ordeal and pretended illness and kept away from the slaughter house. My brother would tell me of the number of rats the butcher had boiled on that day.

One day the butcher asked me to shoot a steer. I had hunted blackbirds, wild ducks, and even jack rabbits. But the act of shooting a huge steer seemed to me revolting. The butcher said, "You wanna eat, don't you?"

It was after considerable threats that I consented to shoot the steer. Furthermore, I had to go into the corral outside and coax the huge animal into a narrow passageway up an incline leading to a closet-like compartment of the slaughter house. After I had closed the plank door behind the animal, I returned to the butcher who was holding a heavy Winchester rifle. He handed it to me. The beast inside the narrow enclosure began to stomp and bellow, trying to escape. It pushed its heavy body against the strong planked walls that barely shook under the animal's constant impact.

I stood on a box in front of the door of the enclosure. A hole had been drilled half way up the door through which the barrel of the gun could be placed. I looked through it. The beast had quieted down somewhat, and when my eyes met the large, glazed eyes of the steer, they stared back at me, and during that long strange gaze I began to tremble. There was something quiet and peaceful all over the face of the animal. The white triangle mark on its

forehead between the horns and eyes seemed to me like a field of pure white snow. I could stand it no longer and looked at the butcher. "I, I can't do it, Mr. Nook."

My brother Silvio said, "You're a sissy. Let me do it."

"You're too little. You can't even hold the gun," the butcher said. He turned to me. "Don't make such a big thing out of it, Angelo. Do it and get it over with."

That night as I lay in bed I tried to forget the face of the steer. The loud report of the rifle kept blasting away in my mind. All through the night I tossed and turned, but the face of the steer would not disappear. My brother complained. My mother, who sensed a change in me after the killing, begged me not to return to the slaughter house. "That butcher is crazy," she huffed. "It's his job to slaughter the animals. He must be out of his mind."

After that occurrence I went to the slaughter house less and less. The work my brother and I did there was paid off in kind. We would bring home meat, liver, brains, and sometimes even a raw pig's ham which my mother would cure and process into Italian prosciutto, a delicious spiced ham that was considered a delicacy. From scraps of pig's meat she would make a sausage known to Italians as *bivoldo* which contained, besides meat, pine nuts, raisins, cloves and other spices. The ingredients were then stuffed into a gut of the pig, its ends tied, then boiled. It was usually sliced and served cold.

What brought about a climax to my work as a butcher's helper occurred the day when the butcher asked me to go to the pig pen and shoot two hogs. "Pick out the fattest ones," he ordered.

I flatly refused to shoot the pigs.

He was at that moment removing the entrails from the carcass of a newly slaughtered steer which hung from a pulley. He pulled out the mass of entrails and held it in both his hands. Before I could escape he had wrapped the entire slimy mass around my shoulders. "There. Take that home and cook it," he said.

Growing Up in an Alien Land

TEISER: How did you manage to learn English? Did other members of your family learn English without great difficulty? Did you continue to speak Italian at home?

ANGELO: My father and his brother had learned some English from their friends who had come earlier to America. I had learned gradually from boys and girls I played with. It was difficult. My brothers and sister learned to speak the same way. Some of my friends were immigrants and, as I recall, it was not until I went to school that I really learned to speak English in earnest.

At home we always spoke our native language. My parents always encouraged us never to forget it. "It may well be of use to you someday," they said.

It was during this period in America that my interest in drawing was revived.

Dreams of the village in Italy, my schooling there, and especially those of my grandfather and of old Jacobo the cabinetmaker, occurred quite frequently.

My first day in school was a deplorable one for me and my brother. The boys played all sorts of pranks on us, as they did on all newcomers. Innocent aliens were given a special treatment. It was called "initiation," and some of the ordeals were injurious. I remember being beaten on my way home after school, my clothes smeared with cow dung. One day my father talked with the school principal but it didn't improve matters much. There were times I longed for my boy friends in Italy.

For my brother and I the ordeal became a cruel, daily event. Every day after school on our way home we were molested. One day we were violently bombarded with eggs from old man Ram's chicken yard. Another day it was when we crossed the little wooden bridge over an irrigation ditch, where the enemy lay waiting among the tall tule and plastered us with mud. Sometimes we were attacked in an open field—a cattle pasture, where an abundant supply of cow dung became the molester's ammunition. And there were times when my brother and I retaliated. But in the end, with odds against us, we became the losers.

One day on our arrival home after a cow dung battle my mother took matters into her own hands. She was so upset and angered that she took us back to school. "I'll tell that Mr. Fox, the principal, a thing or two," she told us.

Mr. Fox, the principal, was in his office. He was small in stature with very sharp, penetrating eyes. He looked at our dung-covered denim overalls and glared at my mother. "What's the problem, Mrs. Angelo?"

My mother, unable to speak hardly a word of English said, "Problem? Bad boys. God damn, bad boys." She moved us closer to the principal's desk and pointed to our dung-splattered clothes. "You like?"

Mr. Fox didn't like our appearance at all. He consoled my mother and told her he would get to the bottom of the matter and punish the malefactors. Words, words, which my mother was unable to understand. "Animali" —animals.

Mr. Fox turned to me. "You're in the first grade, aren't you? Let me see. You're Valenti?"

I said, "Yes." My brother Silvio also said, "Yes." He tried to brush some of the fresh cow dung off his overalls when the principal stopped him, "Outside! Outside! Not in here." Then he turned to me. "Who did this to you?"

The names were on the tip of my tongue. Somehow I could not release them. I was afraid of the consequences. I knew that if I told the truth I would be sure to make matters worse, so I said, "I cannot tell you."

My mother stood quietly by, impatient to get us home and to wash our clothes. She sensed the situation. "Make bad boys stop? Yes." "Yes, Mrs. Angelo. I'll take care of them," replied the principal.

My brother Silvio was more outspoken than I was. That day he became I learned later what Americans call "an informer." It was because of my brother Silvio that the many battles of eggs, mud and cow dung suddenly came to an end.

Later he took boxing lessons from our uncle Rocco, and in later years became very famous for his pugilistic achievements. My American school days were certainly different from those I had experienced in Italy.

TEISER: Did your father's brother, with whom he had been in South America, go to Antioch too? What was his first name?

ANGELO: My father's brother lived in Antioch. His first name was Vincent. (It seemed to be a favorite name among our relatives.) He worked in a saloon. Later he operated a restaurant and boarding house. The clientele were mostly Italians. He married, had a son and daughter. Some time during 1915, he moved his family to San Francisco. There he became chef for the well known Italian restaurant, Il Fior d'Italia, near Broadway and Grant Avenue. I remember having many fine free Italian dinners there on my visits to San Francisco.

TEISER: What was your father's occupation in Antioch?

ANGELO: My father was employed by the paper mill in Antioch as a teamster. The mill at the time manufactured a paper made from straw. The straw had been baled by a hay press, after the harvester had reaped the grain. I remember huge, yellow pyramids of it stacked in open fields. It was my father's job to truck the baled straw to the mill. It was strenuous work loading and unloading a truck full of two-hundred-pound bales of straw. Workmen worked from six a.m. to six p.m. in those days. He earned one dollar a day. And I remember his back aches, during the cold winter days, when "Bella Donna Plasters" were the only remedy. There were days when it became unbearable to live with him. Later on he was given a better job, and in our family there was peace again.

Every Sunday found the Angelo family in church, all dressed in their best clothes. I remember the pair of new shoes which I was allowed to wear only to Sunday mass. They turned out to be shoes made for girls—boot-like in shape with high heels and buttons on one side. My father bought them at a sale. At the sight of the shoes, the girls would giggle and the boys

called me endearing names. Finally my sister became the proud possessor of them.

TEISER: Were there other Italian families living in Antioch?

ANGELO: As in many cities and towns throughout America, there are to be found communities of different nationalities. We lived downtown, as it was called because of its lower elevation. Uptown was where the so-called high class people lived, such as merchants, town officials, doctors, et cetera. Our district was made up of immigrants, mostly Italians, Portuguese and Chinese. The Italians were very clannish there. Some of them even graduated to the uptown district.

TEISER: Did you and other family members really suffer from social discrimination?

ANGELO: We suffered little discrimination among the elderly people. It was mostly from the young, during my early school days, that we suffered the most.

TEISER: What schools did you and your brothers and sister attend?

ANGELO: I and my brothers and sister attended elementary grade school. My education there ended after the third grade.

TEISER: Would you describe a little more fully than you did in your "Autobiographical Story" how a teacher in Antioch became interested in your art work and helped you buy materials? What kind of art work were you doing, and what subjects were you depicting?

ANGELO: It was my teacher, who sensed an artistic talent in me, and helped me, not only by instructions, but by supplying me with art materials as well. She was also very interested in my life in Tuscany, as she had spent some time in my native land. I drew mostly pictures of steamboats, mountains, and scenes around me.

TEISER: Would you describe what you remember about the earthquake of April 18, 1906, and what you did when it occurred?

ANGELO: I remember the earthquake of 1906 very well. And I recall an incident before it occurred. It was my father's duty to supply our family with fresh water, because the water pumped from the windmill contained too much alkali and was undrinkable.

Early each morning, before going to work, my father would harness our horse to a wagon carrying a hundred-gallon barrel. He would go to a friend's water hydrant, fill the barrel and return to our house. On that particular day the horse stopped suddenly a short distance from our house. I was awakened by my father's voice, shouting and cursing, trying to urge the horse on. I rose from my bed and looked out the window. It was early dawn. I could see my father pulling on the reins. The horse stood still, snorted and neighed, stamping its hoofs frantically. Then suddenly the house shook, creaked and shivered. There was panic in the house, I heard my mother shouting, "Earthquake! Earthquake!" I stood frozen to the window. To me it seemed the end of the world. The horse and wagon came tumbling down an incline toward the house. The windmill, a wooden structure, fell on its side. After the movement, though it lasted only a short while, I had the feeling that the earth still shook.

All of us dressed. Outdoors a deadly silence prevailed. The brick chimney was shattered. My mother prayed. The horse and my father continued on their way to the house. From the town of Antioch voices of people and the barking of dogs could be heard. Later that day we received news that the city of San Francisco was being destroyed by fire.

TEISER: You have written that after the earthquake, books and magazines were dumped in the nearby millyard. Could you look at them there, or did you take most that interested you?

ANGELO: After the earthquake the paper mill received many train car-loads of baled newspapers, magazines, and many books of all kinds—all had been soiled and torn or charred. I spent considerable time rummaging through the heaps of rubbish, looking mainly into books with illustrations, such as school books, and seed catalogs.

But as I rummaged I was searching for a special book too. One my teacher showed me in Italy, "the book that sparkled." I had no such good fortune. But I did manage to take home enough books and magazines containing reproductions of paintings and drawings to keep me occupied for a time.

The pilfering became so great that finally the mill placed a watchman in the paper mill yard, and that was the end of my treasure hunt.

TEISER: Did you read in the Antioch library? Were there reproductions of art works there or elsewhere for you to look at?

ANGELO: Antioch did not have a public library. The Carnegie Library was built later, after I had left school. I spent considerable time there. It was a treasure house of learning for me, especially relating to art. There were books filled with reproductions of the work of Old Masters and also those of American artists.

TEISER: Were other brothers and sisters born after the family moved to Antioch? If so, would you describe each of them as you did those born in Italy?

ANGELO: After we moved to Antioch three new members were added to our family. My brothers Joseph and John and my sister Rose. Joseph was born shortly after the earthquake. He contracted typhoid fever and was sick a long time. I remember him as a gentle boy, somewhat retarded, who died at an early age.

My brother John was born with crippled hands. He was very intelligent and somewhat aggressive. He aspired to become a musician, but ended being a maintenance man at the town's largest theatre. He died of throat cancer, 1961.

My sister Rose is the youngest member of the Angelo family. She was married at an early age and lives in Antioch. She is the youngest and I the oldest—the only survivors of the Angelo family.

Jobs, Art Work and Story Books

TEISER: You have indicated that you started working on farms about three years after you arrived in Antioch; that would be about 1908, when you were eleven. Is that correct? You must have been small to do heavy labor; what kind of work did you do? How much were you paid? Did you enjoy the work at all?

ANGELO: Due to an ever increasing family, illness, and poverty, I was forced to leave my school studies. It was during 1908 that I began to work for my uncle Rocco who had a farm near Rio Vista in the Delta, which was at that time being reclaimed. He planted many acres of varieties of beans. It was during harvest time that I worked there. I remember working beside a crew of Italians and Chinese. The bean vines had to be pulled out of the ground early in the morning, long before sunrise. I recall my frost-frozen hands, how they ached. The Chinese never complained. They had a storytelling system while they worked that fascinated me. The men worked six in a row. The head man would begin a story. The second man would repeat it, and so on, until the last man in the row confirmed that part of the story with a grunt. And since I worked at the end of the line, a young Chinese boy would translate for me. During the afternoon when the bean plants were dry, they would be thrashed. And during those long nights, sleeping mostly under the stars, how I longed to be back in my bed and with my family. For my work I received twenty-five cents a day and board.

I also worked part-time for Ha Young. I was about thirteen years old then. He was a tall Manchurian who wore a braided pigtail, rolled like a bun, on the top of his head. He lived in an old house near the railroad station and the Chinese colony. The house

had once been a well cared-for dwelling. The floors had rotted. What was once a parlor was now a storage for cultivating tools, plows, harrows, et cetera. He was a kind, hard working, honest man, whose main occupation was cultivating tule land in which to grow vegetables, melons and strawberries which he peddled in a horse-drawn wagon.

My work consisted of weeding, raking and sometimes planting various seedlings. He told me countless stories of his boyhood in China. He smoked a long stemmed pipe from which issued a scent I had not known before. Later I learned he smoked opium. He lived to be over a hundred years old.

During the hay-baling season I worked on a hay press as derrick boy; work that kept me and a horse moving barefoot over cut wheat stubble, back and forth, from sunrise to sunset, with a crew of energetic Portuguese shouting, "More hay!" all day long. We had our meals in a cook-wagon. Manuel, the old cook was not the best of chefs. It was a daily diet of bacon, beans and potatoes. I took a daily bath in a water trough for horses and cows. Sometimes I slept in barns, but most of the time burrowed into a haystack and slept until the breakfast gong sounded, which was before sunrise. I always looked forward to Sunday and a good meal at home.

My salary was seventy-five cents a day, including three meals.

One day I was so sick a doctor was called. I had a bad case of ptomaine poisoning. I recovered, but I'll never forget the terrible retching that almost spelled the end of my life.

Other jobs followed. For a time I worked in a general merchandise store as delivery boy. Kept the floor swept, washed windows and aspired to become a sales clerk. Much of the merchandise arrived in Antioch by steamboat from San Francisco. How well I remember those stern- and side-wheelers, with their cabined, upper decks for passengers. Often, during the foggy winter season, the warning sound of their whistles could be heard. I also worked for Nicholas, the junk man, and also did janitor work for the *Antioch Ledger*, a weekly newspaper.

TEISER: Did you continue doing art work at the same time? What kind? Was there anything or anyone who helped maintain your interest?

ANGELO: My evenings and Sundays were occupied drawing and painting, copying pictures from reproductions of the work of old masters. Some of the merchants were very kind. They exhibited some of my pictures in their store windows. Also my uncle* who owned a saloon would raffle my pictures on a busy Saturday night. The pictures were mostly landscapes and of fruit and flowers. Some of my (very bad) copies of old masters sold quite well. I received as much as a dollar apiece for them. Once I was commissioned by a friend of my uncle to reproduce a large painting of a nude which hung on a wall behind the bar. It was a copy from one of Rubens' works. During the turn of the century nude pictures in saloons were quite popular. I was offered ten dollars for the work. My mother gently discouraged me not to accept the offer. "Why don't you try to paint Madonnas and Childs, like the ones old Jacobo, in Italy, painted?" I painted a few, copies from Raphael's work, but no one was interested in religious pictures.

From the comments directed by some of the better educated people of the town toward my work as an artist, I soon discovered that very few people were willing to admire my ability. Some of them even considered me a little soft in the head. There were times when it became difficult to renew the confidence in myself.

Most of my pictures were painted in our attic by the light of a kerosene lamp. It was often my mother who would come and scold me for staying up so late. From my brothers, who slept in the same room, there was no end of complaints. "Some artist," they grumbled. My father who was born of poor peasant stock without a school education did not discourage my efforts. He was always thankful when I turned my meager earnings over to him, and gave me a small allowance. I would often visit my school teacher, who supplied me with paints and brushes. She hoped that

* Vincent Angelo

some day I would return to school.

It was during this period in my life that I made my first trip to San Francisco with my father. I was awe-struck by the wreckage that remained after the earthquake. We visited friends in North Beach. He took me to Golden Gate Park and to see the Pacific Ocean.

TEISER: In view of your later writing career —did you make up stories when you were a youngster? Did you read much?

ANGELO: I soon began to read story books. Some of the books were paperback adventure stories, like Horatio Alger, Mark Twain, Jack London, et cetera. Some very exciting western tales of intrigue and mayhem, which I bought at the local drug store for ten cents, took up my spare time. I became an avid reader. Some of the stories I read were retold to my younger brothers and sister, and to some of my friends and companions. After a year or two I began to invent stories. I wish that I had written some of them down. They were fantastic tales of adventure, of brave men who rescued beautiful damsels from dangerous, wicked men. I always carried a paperback book in the back pocket of my overalls.

My mother often said, "That boy one day will become a professor."

TEISER: Did you ever return to school after those first three years?

ANGELO: As much as I longed for a better education, I never returned to school. All of my education was derived from listening, reading, observing and above all from experience.

TEISER: You have written that you later worked in many places, "factories, paper mills, chemical and rubber plants." Were they all in the Antioch area? Can you recall what they were and what kind of work you did? Were you living at home all this time?

ANGELO: At the age of fifteen I was employed as a helper to two house painters. The paper mill needed painting. Because of the heat involved in paper making, white lead paint was used. I remember my eyes smarting as I painted the high ceiling above the hundred-foot-long machine. The heat often reached a hundred degrees. The work lasted about two months.

During the course of work it was agreed that I was to paint the huge machine all by myself. The machine was a complicated cast iron structure, supporting drum-like steam dryers. It had been painted gray. The superintendent, who I knew well, left the color scheme to me. I chose an olive green paint. It took me about a month to scrape off all the grease, grime and old paint and two months to repaint it. Everyone agreed I had done a beautiful job. However, I wasn't very pleased with its appearance and made some suggestions.

"The machine would look better if I was to decorate parts of the flat iron structure." The superintendent agreed and told me to proceed. During the following month the drab green machine was transformed into a glittering colorful array of bright red roses, blue violets, gold striping, arabesques, and other decorative inspirations. At the sight of it, the house painters were in despair. I think it was the only decorated paper-making machine in America. I even got my picture in the local paper.

My fame spread through the town. I received commissions from housewives, old widows who wanted their buggies decorated. I was wallowing in wealth.

During the winter I worked in the paper mill, and learned the method of paper making from the wet pulp end (the beaters) to the dry end where the paper has been dried, pressed and cut into varied widths and lengths. And the continuous, grinding, sound of the machine never stopped. Night and day it was heard all over town.

My next job was at the Bowers Rubber Co. three miles west of Antioch. The mill manufactured rubber garden hose, fire hose and rubber tires. I worked at a tubing machine. It was built much like a sausage

making machine. A hot soft rubber compound was fed into an opening which flowed out of a spout, a perfect rubber tube which was allowed to dry stretched on a long floor, after which it was taken to a weaving room where another machine wove a lining of linen fabric around the rubber tubing, then brought back to me for its final rubber covering. It was then laid into a huge circular iron mold and cooked by steam. My salary was one dollar fifty cents a day. I was happy, and managed to save enough to buy a motorcycle for twelve dollars.

After six months of work, due to overproduction, I, and some other workmen were laid off. I tried sign painting and creating show cards for several stores with little success. In Antioch I became known as "Little Michaelangelo."

During fruit and asparagus season I worked in the cannery, filling crates and hand trucking the product onto steamboats. Finally I was at work again in the paper mill. The work, especially the night shifts, became so monotonous that there were periods when I fell asleep at the machine, and periods when I heard strange voices amid the loud clatter of cogs and wheels. Some of the workmen were very kind. They allowed me to sleep and took care of my work.

A New Life in San Francisco

TEISER: After the somewhat mystical experience you described in your "Autobiographical Story," in a factory when a voice seemed to come from a machine and counsel you to do work you enjoyed, what did you do to begin a new life, or career? What were the first steps you took?

ANGELO: San Francisco occupied my mind more and more. I even dreamed of living there. I was thoroughly convinced that I must leave my family and Antioch and begin a new life. I wanted to learn more about art. During one of my trips to the city I visited two art schools on California Street. I was impressed. It was 1914, during the First World War, that I made up my

mind to make the change. At the age of seventeen, a young man holds the world and his destiny in his hands.

It was a sad day when the Angelo family waited for the Santa Fe train that would take me to San Francisco. There were moments of joy, mixed with fear and anxiety. And there was a considerable amount of advice from my mother and father concerning the temptations and evils with which I would eventually be confronted. "And are you wearing your St. Anthony medal? It was blessed by the priest in Italy, you know," my mother said. I had worn it around my neck since the day I was baptized. My father gave me a five-dollar gold piece as a token of his esteem.

A new life began for me.

I arrived in San Francisco in the fall of 1914. A glossy patent leather suitcase contained my worldly possessions. Of course my mother made certain that I had an extra St. Anthony medal, just in case I lost the one I wore night and day around my neck. In a carton I also carried my accordion, one that Nicholas the junk dealer had given me during the time I worked for him.

In San Francisco, I lived with a family who were friends of my parents, in a flat near the Spanish church* in the Italian quarter known as North Beach. It was a sort of boarding house. As luck would have it, I met a young man there who was drafted into the army. He was an independent, successful janitor for three apartment buildings on Sacramento Street near Polk. He was kind and generous and turned the work over to me. He explained all the chores connected with the janitorial profession. I was glad to be employed. My living quarters were in the basement near the furnace, with two small windows at sidewalk level, where I had a view of pedestrians walking up and down Sacramento Street. A few potted plants on the window sill gave the place a touch of home.

Perhaps those early days in San Francisco held a special meaning for me, a new life, a promise of the future because I was so young, so innocent of worldly ways, so filled with faith and hope. Nor did I dream

* Our Lady of Guadalupe, 908 Broadway.

that I would witness the horrors of war, Prohibition and the great Depression, joyous days and depressing ones.

However, my journey toward self-discovery was at the time an expedition filled with fascination, some triumphs and a great deal of frustration. Between working hours I tried to improve myself by spending evenings and Sundays at public libraries and at art museums, learning new ways of life which my meager school years had failed to provide. I haunted book-stores. And there were times when I felt that reading was not enough, that what I needed was more experience. I began to observe life around me more intensely. I endeavored to make new friends.

My experience as a janitor was not a very enlightening one. The care of three apartment dwellings on the northeast corner of Sacramento and Polk Streets was a responsible one. Beside the daily stoking of three coal furnaces there were hallways to be vacuumed, front steps to be washed, brass door knobs to be polished. And there were days, especially those on weekends, when the tenants' demands for house cleaning and window washing were so numerous that I had little time for anything else. My total earnings averaged about eighty dollars a month, which was a great deal of money in those days.

A friendly Jewish tailor and his wife occupied a small apartment and shop on the ground floor. They were very kind to me. Since I became one of their frequent customers, they often invited me to dinner. As usual my working clothes consisted of blue denim ("Can't Bust 'Em" overalls). I will always remember the soft coonskin collar he attached on a mackinaw, a heavy woolen, red and blue checkered overcoat I had purchased at a sale on Market Street. It was my Sunday best, and, worn with shining patent leather shoes and a fedora hat, a pink shirt and red necktie, the ensemble attracted so much attention that I wore it only on dark winter nights.

The owner of the apartment dwellings was an Irishman whom I knew only as Mr. Yager. I learned later that he was very wealthy and owned property in the Mission district. He always dressed in coarse woven woolen tweed clothes, and wore a brown derby,

that was slightly cocked to one side of his graying head. There were times when his gent'e face appeared like an overripe tomato, his balance unsteady and his mouth dripped considerable spittle. He always inspected the entrance to each dwelling and encouraged me to keep up the good work. He never left the premises without first placing a crisp dollar bill in my hand.

Summer was coming on and I spent some time exploring San Francisco. All around the city there was still evidence of the effects of the fire and earthquake. There were vacant lots throughout the city. Some construction had begun. Everywhere new buildings rose out of the ruins. I had made some friends among the merchants along Polk Street, for whom I washed display windows and received payment in food. The world fair was then being planned. I spent considerable time watching its growth and completion. And some weekends were spent in Antioch. I journeyed there by ferry to Point Richmond, then to Antioch by the Santa Fe railroad. Those were happy reunions. And, as always, my mother being the wonderful cook that she was, prepared the most delicious Tuscan feasts. There were raviolis, fritto mistos, huge salads, fruit cakes, and wine. And after each visit, there remained a strange loneliness within me that was often difficult to overcome.

TEISER: Were you also studying art in what spare time you had? What kind and how?

ANGELO: I continued with my painting and drawing. Sometimes I painted far into the night by the light of a single light bulb. By my frequent visits to the museums I discovered again some original works by Italian masters. I became fascinated by the realism of early American painters whose names I learned later: Keith, Hill, Beckwith, Moran, Innis, who all became a part of California's contribution to American art culture. There were also new painters, [Charles Rollo] Peters, [Gottardo] Piazzoni, [Maynard] Dixon, et cetera.

While reading a book on the life of Leonardo da Vinci I chanced upon a passage that was rather a mystical one. The meaning of its content kept me wondering for a long, long while. It was later explained to

me.

"Science comes from observation, not by authority. That one must strive to look inward as well as outward."

As a schoolboy I had always been shy and withdrawn. It was my mother who had the greater artistic influence on me. On the contrary my father was rather a stern person, who hoped I would become a mechanic. He often emphasized the importance of the coming industrial revolution in America. He stressed that art was not a profitable occupation. Art was only for dreamers. I was a dreamer.

My earnings increased, and I soon had a savings account. It was not my plan to remain a janitor for the rest of my life. I wanted to become an artist, which was my sole purpose in life.

TEISER: Anne Englund wrote (in the leaflet for the exhibit of your work at the San Francisco Public Library in September and October 1975) that one of the three buildings in which you worked as a janitor housed Arthur Best's art school. (It is listed in the 1914 San Francisco Directory as "Best's Art School, A. W. Best prop., 1625 California.") Would you describe how you became acquainted with Best and what the result was? Could you also describe him as a person and as an artist and teacher and tell a little about his school?

ANGELO: My employer, Mr. Yager, encouraged me in my endeavors. He found additional work for me, and by a stroke of luck, the building I was to be janitor of contained an art school. It was situated on California Street, adjoining Blum's Candy Store located on the southwest corner of Polk Street. It was a two-story redwood structure erected shortly after the earthquake as an office building. It contained twelve large rooms, six on each side of a long hallway. The art school was composed of three connecting rooms with skylights. Painted on a panel of glass was a sign, "Best's Art School. A.W. Best, Prop." Of course I was elated over having an art school only a block away from my living quarters.

I had already visited the Mark Hopkins Art Institute on Nob Hill across the street from the Fairmont Hotel. It was such an imposing structure, dark brown, adorned with many gables, spires and jig-saw ornamented designs, that I feared to enter its mammoth doors. I recall the large garden sloping down toward Pine Street, and the view of the city below. I finally decided to enroll in evening classes at Best's Art School.

Mr. Arthur Best, the director and instructor was a well known California painter. He was a patient, middle-aged man, with a gentle, hesitating manner of speaking. His landscapes which hung on the walls, and I remember them well, were simple, realistic renderings of California hills, scenes of Mt. Tamalpais, fields of poppies, views of Yosemite and some tropical scenes painted in the Hawaiian Islands. Also I recall various interesting life sketches executed in color pastels on dark charcoal paper. The interiors of the connecting rooms were papered a tan color, and the woodwork was stained brown. Large glass skylights adorned with cobwebs produced the only light during the day.

On some evenings, Mrs. Arthur Best taught the students. She was a handsome, energetic person, very outspoken, dressed always in the Parisian, bohemian fashion of the times. She had been to Paris and lectured the class on the new art of the French School that soon was to change the mode of painting for many artists throughout the world. The things that impressed me most were her colorful smock-like clothes, and the berets.

My first lesson in art was a real trial. Mr. Best had a very unique way of teaching anatomy. I remember his words as he went around to each student. "Measure. Always measure. Don't trust your eyes. The human body, that is, a perfect body, is nine heads in length from the top of the head to the sole of the feet. Don't trust your eyes." I thought it was a strange way of teaching, one I am certain old Jacobo, the village painter, would not have approved of.

I recall an old gentleman who came to class. He had a system of measuring all his own. There were times when he sat and just stared at the model, holding a plumb line.

My first lesson drawing from a live, nude model was a very frustrating one. I constantly dropped my charcoal stick and there were times when my hand trembled so badly I could hardly breathe. I had seen pictures by Italian Masters of nudes, but to be in a room in the presence of a naked woman was an experience I had never felt before. I constantly wiped my forehead. Out of the corner of my eyes I scanned the other students. They all seemed composed, measuring, drawing, all intent on executing a masterpiece. Instead of drawing I perspired. I tried again and again. I was glad when Mr. Best called a rest period.

Dolly, the model, sat down and stretched her arms and legs. Standing a pose for twenty minutes at a stretch can be very exhausting. I was to learn about that later, when I modeled for some of my art lessons. Dolly was indeed a well proportioned model. She was well known by professional artists, was of medium height with a suntanned body, full-lipped mouth, and blue eyes that sparkled with mischief. Her head was topped by a massive ripple of golden hair draping her shoulders. Dolly was very popular with everyone.

At times, during class rest periods, she walked around naked to see and criticize the work of the students. "That's not me." She liked to flirt with the men students.

A month later, when my feelings returned to normal, I fell deeply in love with Dolly. In a way unknown to her I wrote little friendly notes to her under the fictitious name of Leonardo. Because I was a shy person she grew very fond of teasing me about my curly chestnut-colored hair. It wasn't long before she addressed me as Cupid. I was seventeen years old then and experiencing some very frustrating amorous fantasies.

I studied art three nights a week. During the summer months the weather was milder. I had more time to spend at drawing and painting.

One day Mr. Yager introduced me to Madam Morssini, a retired ballet dancer, who had a large ground floor dancing studio on the corner of Sacramento and Larkin. Madam was only four feet eight inches tall. She was the most energetic person I

had ever met. She had studied ballet dancing in Milan, Italy, and had become a prima donna dancer there.

During my daily chores along Sacramento Street I often heard the sound of piano music coupled with the sound of Madam Morssini's voice. Sometimes it went on for hours. Later, twice weekly I swept and treated the dance floor with a white adhesive powder that kept the dancers from slipping. I spent hours watching the young girls and boys performing their lessons. And although Madam Morssini was well into her late years she kept up with them, all the while shouting instructions, her voice sounding much like that of a child.

We became friends and in the evenings talked about our lives in our native land, Italy. She wanted me to study ballet dancing. "You have the physique. You can do it. I will teach you to be a Nijinsky! And it won't cost you anything." One evening she invited me to dinner. She had prepared rice Milanese, spiced with saffron, herbs, and cooked in olive oil and butter with grated parmesan cheese. It was the most delicious meal I had since I left home.

Despite my already overstrained schedule, I decided to enter Madam Morssini's dance class. Even today I laugh when I picture myself dressed solely in red leotards, tripping through all the gymnastics entailed in the art of ballet dancing. The boys and girls who were well advanced in their training were often of great help to me. There were times when I was so inspired that I dreamed of performing on a stage before a large audience, all applauding my outstanding performance. It wasn't long before Madam Morssini decided to give me special attention and training. However, a body can only endure so much. I began to neglect my work as a janitor. With art and dancing classes, coupled with added responsibilities, I began to lose weight, and my nights were occupied with disturbing dreams. I gave up the dancing lessons.

One morning, after I had stoked the last furnace and adjusted the drafts for proper slow burning I boarded a California cable car. I had discovered a new bookstore on Post Street, called Paul Elder's bookstore, where I often went to browse in search of books on the art of painting. The store was across the street from Gump's. It was the best bookstore in the city.

To this day I remember the tall, cordial Mr. Elder, who was often helpful. I found a book on the art of Michaelangelo containing numerous illustrations of the master's work. I paid the sum of a dollar for it. I glanced through it as I made my way back to my living quarters.

I climbed up Powell Street to Sacramento and walked up the hill to Jones Street. Much of Nob Hill was barren of dwellings. With the exception of the Fairmont Hotel and the huge Mark Hopkins mansion, most of the hill consisted of vacant lots. I well remember the remains of the Towne home, which consisted of two Ionic marble pillars supporting a cross beam, which had been the entranceway to the mansion. It became known as "The Portals of the Past," which can be seen today, resting peacefully on the edge of Lloyd Lake in Golden Gate Park.

It was a bright, clear, breezy day, with the blue waters of the bay stretching northward to meet a snow-white bank of fog that lay across the green hills of Marin and over the Golden Gate. I reached the crest of Nob Hill at Jones and Sacramento Streets. What I saw at the foot of Sacramento and Polk was unbelievable. It wasn't possible. A cloud of smoke rose in the air above one of the buildings of which I was caretaker. I saw two fire engines, a hook and ladder, a lot of people milling around, and a long ladder reaching up to the roof. I raced down the hill, all the while mumbling, "It can't be!" I raced across Leavenworth and Hyde. At Larkin I knew it was one of my buildings. Exhausted and wringing my hands, I sought information from a fireman letting out more hose to reach the three-story height to the roof. At that moment a fireman rushed out of the basement doorway. "It's only the chimney," he cried. "No fire below." He shook his head. "Some damn fool has gone and left the lower draft on the furnace open," he told the other firemen.

I began to explain to the firemen that I was the caretaker of the building, but no one seemed to take an interest in what I had to say. There was little damage done. It might have ended in disaster. (An overheated flue has been known to cause a fire when in contact with wood.) And to this day, whenever I

see firefighting trucks racing on a street, those memorable words, "Some damn fool has gone and left the lower draft on the furnace open," still ring loud and clear in my mind.

Mr. Yager, the owner of the building, was nowhere to be seen. I was relieved as the fire trucks, their sirens screaming, raced toward Van Ness Avenue. The shop keepers dispersed. My friends the Jewish tailor and Madam Morssini were sympathetic. The tailor said, "I am lucky. I could've lost my business. Oi! Valenti, you're a lucky boy."

It was not until a week after the fire that Mr. Yager came to visit me. He appeared less jovial, less so than I had ever seen him before. He seemed more preoccupied than usual, too—as though some important decision had to be made—one that he was unable to bring to a conclusion. He invited me to lunch in a restaurant on Polk Street. He told me I could order anything I wanted.

I felt somewhat uncomfortable, and had a feeling some important change in my life was about to take place. My mother always accused me of being an oversensitive boy. And before lunch was finished Mr. Yager very gently explained his and my situation. He told me without a doubt I would someday become a great artist. He ordered another drink of whiskey, his third, and continued. "Valenti, you are a very talented and gifted person. You shouldn't waste your time doing janitor work." He was practically drooling with sympathy.

"That's all right, Mr. Yager," I replied. "I'll take better care of the furnaces from now on. Don't worry. There won't ever be another fire. Ever." I sensed a change in his voice. He took another swallow of whiskey followed by a mouthful of cornbeef hash. He stared at me. His red, moist eyes dripped tears. "God damn it, Angelo," he stuttered, "you're fired."

I was not surprised, but I found my cornbeef hash a little more difficult to swallow. Before I could think of a reply Mr. Yager cleared his throat, took another drink and spoke quietly, "I found another job for you. It'll be better than being a janitor. I think you'll like it. For the time being, until you have found

a place to live, you may stay where you are. The new janitor has a family and his own apartment.

Changing Times

ANGELO: My predictions had proved right. An important change in my life took place. Those were the days of many unforeseen changes. The war in Europe was on everyone's lips. The conflict between France and Germany expanded. There were rumors that President Wilson would travel to Europe. "It's a Long, Long Way to Tipperary," became a popular song. And the Huns of von Hindenburg had begun to spread their power westward and the League of Nations was dreamed of. A new dawn was breaking over America. The I.W.W. federation was well on its way. The Preparedness Day Parade and the prophecy of Eugene Debs. And "Who threw the little Bomb?" The movie industries that were to change the American way of life were well on their way. The old-time crank-up Edison cylinder talking machine, "His Master's Voice," was replaced by the flat record-playing upright Victrola, with songs and music of the day.

When beer was still ten cents, ice cream five cents a cone, and keeping up with the Joneses was well underway; as were the beginning of the plans for installment buying, which, unforeseen, was to make every borrower a debtor. When farmers were still farmers and not subsidiaries of banks and corporations. When false teeth were ordered by mail. And then the new craze for thousands of cures for all ailments. When Ford put many people to work and produced automobiles for \$800 and sold them cheaper each year after. When people went faithfully to church, and when man and woman were married and seldom were divorced. The days of the fox trot and tango. When wine was served in paper cups. "September Morn"—the little naked woman shivering in water up to her ankles on the beach, her face disturbed because her hand couldn't fully cover that forbidden part of her

body, framed and sold by the million.

Now you could keep up with the Joneses for \$20 per month. "Don't just dream of a beautiful home—buy one." So debt and time marched on. And most important of all were the pinup girls—that was the beginning of a sex revolution in America, only in disguise. A good many people were looking for work, for less to do, more time to do it in, and more pay for not getting it done.

And through it all, I became a little wiser than I had ever been before.

Sixteen Twenty-Five California

ANGELO: Sixteen twenty-five California Street, 1915. To Mr. Best, bless his kind heart—wherever he may be—and I think if there is a heaven he ought to be there—I owe a great debt. My new living quarters, which I learned later was a spare room annexed to the school, was smaller than the others, with an overhead skylight and a window that faced a three-foot light well and a brick wall. It had been a storage room with an entrance to the hall. The rent which I paid to Mr. Best was eight dollars a month, including gas and electricity. A tiny round wash basin and a small two-burner gas plate in a corner served as my kitchen. I felt happier living among artists and writers. I still kept occupied doing janitor work for merchants along Polk Street.

It wasn't long before I became acquainted with the tenants in the building.

One large studio facing California Street was then occupied by a photographer named Arnold Schroder. He was a tall, handsome Teutonic, athletic type, with rust colored hair and a ruddy complexion. I never really became acquainted with him, but felt, as I learned later, that there existed during the First World War an anti-German period which may well explain his sudden disappearance.

The vacancy was later occupied by another photographer, Charles Barrett, with whom I became well acquainted. More about Mr. Charles Barrett later. Another occupant was a Swiss-born painter and muralist known as Jean Jacques Phister. He was a tall, thin man who wore a swallow-tailed coat and neatly pressed trousers. At first sight he also appeared mysterious, for he was occasionally seen carrying a battered black violin case, which I later learned contained only his soiled laundry.

One day he invited me to his studio. The small room was a riot of paper, canvasses, frames, old newspapers, a cot with a picture of a Madonna and Child hanging over it, some death masks, among them one of Voltaire grinning. In a corner against a wall stood huge rolled up compositions for future murals. He promised to show them to me some day. One entire wall was filled with miniature paintings, no larger than postcard size. I was amazed at his manner of painting. They were neatly framed and priced at \$2.00. The subject matter consisted of lush green, very realistic landscapes. Most of them showed birds, mostly sparrows in all manner of action. He asked me to have a cup of tea. I accepted. From a drawer he dug up some long forgotten ginger cookies. Meanwhile he told me a little of his life as a boy, living in the Swiss Alps, and of the daring feats he had performed as a mountain climber. "Ah yes! Life was good then."

Strange as it may seem, Jean Jacques Phister, too, disappeared. He moved away without leaving an address, or paying his rent.

Idwal Jones, an author and news reporter, rented Phister's studio. He was a quiet man, hard of hearing, who had written some novels. He also wrote articles on the vineyard industry in the Napa Valley.

The studio adjoining Jones' studio was occupied by a Hungarian who was living with a wealthy American society woman. He was a follower of Seurat, the broken color theory of light in a painting. He always wore very flashy clothes and brilliant colored neckties.

The remainder of the rooms on that side of the hallway were occupied by "The L'Hommedieu Advertising Agency." Mr. L'Hommedieu was too busy to be interested in the fine arts. His line was advertising only. At the end of the building were two washrooms, Men and Women. There were no bathing facilities in the building. I always went to the Lurline Public Baths* on Bush Street, where for twenty-five cents one could rent a tub, soap and a towel. I contracted an awful case of rash there before I stopped going. I bought a galvanized tin washtub and took baths in my studio.

Charles Grant, the famous marine painter, occupied a studio near the Best Art School. He was a quiet man who was very proud of his ability to capture on canvas the true details of marine life and all kinds of ships. I recall a large painting he was working on. It was the Pacific naval fleet in the process of entering the bay, with a background of the Golden Gate and the green Marin hills, which he was determined to call his masterpiece. The next three studios were occupied by Best's Art School.

The artist John* T.E. Stoll occupied the studio next to mine. He was a great craftsman and an etcher. His etchings of marine subjects are well known. He was of German descent, and worked at the Coast Guard Station on the West Coast. Our friendship lasted many years. During the First World War he left his position as a lifeguard and began working as a free-lance artist, producing, for many years, some of the most beautiful advertising drawings of that period.

It was during the war with Germany that Stoll suffered most, as did many other native-born Germans. I remember many German merchants along Polk Street who were affected. I recall going to a famous German beer hall on Polk Street frequently of an evening with a friend, relishing tasty German dishes served there. And at times, with luck, finding an amiable German girl who, though shy, risked a dance with you. And the German orchestra, composed mostly of brass, played polkas, waltzes and the jazzy, jerky fox

* Lurline Ocean Water Baths

trot. By midnight the hall became so crowded and noisy that it was impossible to hold a conversation. Despite an impending world war, everyone appeared happy.

An event that took place at Best's Art School is one that still comes, from time to time, vividly to mind. It was a studio party in honor of Jack London. I had read some of his adventure stories. They were, as a boy, a part of my introduction to American literature. It was an evening to remember. Many people attended, including poets, artists, newspaper men, and many of the society set were there, all dressed in evening gowns, bedecked with flashing jewels, some with lorgnettes. All had come to pay homage to a great writer. George Sterling, Frank Van Sloan, Maynard Dixon, Gottardo Piazzoni, Walter Davenport who later became known for his famous Temple Bar Tea Room on Tillman Place—all were there.

I stood in a corner with John Stoll, Dolly the model and some of the art students with whom I later became acquainted. We gathered near the huge punch bowl, which had been enforced with brandy mixed with fruit juice.

The piano player, a middle-aged little fellow, about the size of a midget, supplied the jazz dance music, which sounded, and reminded me of the music that I had listened to played on the automatic player piano that was in my uncle's saloon in Antioch. Everybody danced and the building shook. There was no end of laughter and merriment.

I can still envision Jack London, a round fur cap tilted on his head, swinging gayly, dancing a waltz, holding at arm's length a gay young society woman, both alive with laughter. More and more people arrived. They danced in the hallway. By midnight the place was a bedlam. I began to worry about the tenants on the first floor, whom I knew. They were a peaceful, hardworking Japanese family who operated a laundry and cleaning establishment.

During the hubbub, and the height of the celebration, Mr. Matsumoto, the owner, and father of four children arrived on the scene. He apologized gracefully to Mr. Best. "So sorry. Please excuse. Too much

plenty noise. Babies cry. No sleep. Building fall down."

Davy Davenport, who occupied a first floor studio, came to Mr. Best's rescue. Davy, I learned later, was a sort of gambler who was an expert at it, operated a crap game in his studio. He pacified the little Jap. He shouted, "A little less noise please!" But nobody paid the least bit of attention to him. The noise and confusion even grew louder. Davy accompanied Mr. Matsumoto back to his quarters, and returned for his tenth drink of punch and joined in the merriment.

By the clock on the old upright piano it was nearing 2:00 a.m. There seemed to be no end of energy. It must have been the punch. The building fairly trembled. Then suddenly, a discordant note joined the piano music. A sort of loud, thump! thump! thumping sound. Everybody slackened their pace. They listened. Davy was the first to recognize it. He rushed into the hall and down the stairs. The sound persisted. It took only a few minutes for Davy to return. There was a wicked grin on his face. He shouted, "Stop, everybody! Stop! Mr. Matsumoto has declared war. He's chopping down the supports under the building."

Some of the men appeared offended and were going down stairs to see Mr. Matsumoto and threaten him for breaking up the party. By 3:00 a.m. only a few stragglers remained. Jack London had left the party long before midnight. Mr. Best explained later that the famous author was under doctor's orders. I remember vividly, his powerful face and his enduring vitality. It was shortly after that party when I learned of his death.

TEISER: What were the other places where you worked?

ANGELO: Mr. Yager kept his promise. One morning he arrived in his little Ford coupe and drove me to a huge two-story factory building in the Mission district, south of Market Street. It was the American Can Company, manufacturers of various kinds of tin containers. He introduced me to a relative of his, a foreman of the tin can lid stamping department. The stamping machines, all set in rows, were operated by young women who fed flat strips of tin into the machines at a nerve-racking pace. It was my duty to keep the operators

supplied with tin, and to empty the baskets of finished tin can tops. I was also in charge of removing the steel stamping dies whenever necessary, and sharpening them. This was done with a flat steel ping hammer.

There were times when a young woman had to be temporarily relieved, and I would take over the operation of the machine. And there were days when the department echoed with songs, all in unison with the sound of the stamping machines.

Blighted Love

ANGELO: It wasn't very long before I became acquainted with a young Irish girl. We often sat together outside the building during the lunch hour. I thought she was the most beautiful girl I had ever met. There were times when she supplied my lunch. "You're too skinny. Fatten up," she would say. Her name was Madeleine Threadwell. She lived with her mother and father on a slope near Twin Peaks. We often met on a Sunday and sat amid poppies and blue lupine in a field overlooking the city. We talked of many things, her future and mine. I was falling in love again. One Sunday she invited me to dinner. Her parents were friendly, very Irish and strict Catholics. Her father was on the police force, working the Castro district, and there was no end to his tales of adventure, especially those during his night beats.

I bought new clothes and got spruced up, took to shining my shoes and spent a great deal of time whistling the popular tunes, as though very exciting things were about to happen. My drawing was improving, too. In the evenings when I was alone in my studio, I dreamed of a new adventure that would change my entire life. Madeleine—Madeleine was forever on my mind. During working hours I paid more attention to Madeleine's stamping machine than I did to the others. I constantly warned her to be careful, a stamping machine can be dangerous. Watch your hand when feeding it. And every day I could hardly wait for the lunch hour, when we sat together, outside, in the shade of the factory building. I had fallen in love, all

right. Madly in love.

Saturday nights were spent at the movies, Sundays were usually spent in Golden Gate Park, or a long walk on the beach, gathering seashells and stones polished smooth by the elements. There were times when we walked in silence, too, each wrapped in thoughts, then times when we laughed, danced barefoot, running wildly about like two young antelope. And times when we sat silently, embraced in each others arms. And there were suspenseful moments of youthful madness, when it was time to rise and walk again. Then in my heart there were a thousand thunderstorms.

The long summer passed, winter melted into spring and all was well in my world. I felt that one cannot go wrong as long as one sees rainbows, feels the sunshine, and listens to the laughter of children. I was extremely happy with my new companion. In every thing that I did she gave me full support. She read books on art so as to better understand it, in order that a mutual bond exist between us. I became more and more inspired. From my early childhood I had kept pencil and paper busy. Now I spent evenings creating fanciful, imaginary compositions, delineating writhing figures, depicting good and evil.

Perhaps it was as a result of my reading at that time the work of the great Italian poet Dante. Ever since that memorable day—the day my grandfather took me to Rome, where I saw Michaelangelo's Sistine Chapel, depicting powerful, writhing figures in his The Creation and The Last Judgement—no stronger vision has ever occupied my mind.

It was a time when it seemed I could be no happier.

Eight months passed since I began working in the factory, and I knew that the kind of work I was doing was not my ultimate goal in life. I wanted to be an artist. But as my mother used to say, "Rome wasn't built in a day." I became impatient. I had accepted my passion for painting and drawing. What was I doing working in a factory?

Before making a decision I had never consulted a fortune teller or asked this person or that what I should do, or what do you think? This is the way I feel. And yet whatever happens to me always seems a step in the right direction. I am by nature a super optimist, and as most Italians, seem to be blessed with a fatalistic nature—that whatever happens is for the best.

I was unaware of it, but another event was about to occur that would bring about another change in my life.

He was of medium stature with a well proportioned athletic body, and a face that might have been chiseled by an ancient Greek sculptor. His name was Dimitri Papolis.

He was a newcomer to the factory and worked there as a janitor. He spent much of his time keeping the floor swept, and disposing of the tin that had already been stamped. I soon discovered that he was spending considerable time around the machine Madeleine operated, and it wasn't long before he joined us during our lunch hour. He was attending night school "for to speak better the English language," he informed us. Every lunch hour was taken up with tales of his life and experiences in Greece.

More and more each day I felt like an intruder, more and more each day Madeleine's infatuation for this young man grew stronger. I soon reached a period in my life when all was uncertainty. I was by nature a patient fellow, but my strength and enthusiasm was, in the face of this new intrusion, waning, and there were times when I behaved quite badly, so much so, that Madeleine would laugh and tease me. "You're jealous," she would say, her blue Irish eyes laughing. Yes, I was jealous. Soon there were scenes playing out of my mind, scenes that disturbed me because I was not a violent person. During our weekend visits she went along as though nothing had occurred. I soon felt a formality growing in her, that I knew would sooner or later bring about an end to our relationship.

One day during the lunch hour I was late arriving at our accustomed place and found the Greek in the arms of Madeleine. I wanted to hit him. I was embarrassed, and was both sad and angry. Everything happened at that moment, and the picture of my love for Madeleine melted away. It became a different picture, one that was blurred—an abstraction. From that day on I walked with a sting in my heart. Suddenly my life had become empty. Madeleine had become another person. A week later I quit my job.

Weeks of idleness and misgivings occupied my mind most of the time. My enthusiasm waxed low and gave way to cynical thoughts about my future.

There were restless nights, disturbed by recurring dreams of Madeleine. It was as though I was living in Dante's Inferno. Attending the evening sketch classes gave me some relief. Dolly, the model who was a very sensitive person, was quick to discover my condition. I secretly told her all about my great misfortune as a lover. She listened and was sympathetic. "Oh Valenti," she said. "That happens to me all the time." She laughed. "Don't worry. Your time'll come. You'll find your kind."

A week later I became suddenly ill. My life became harder to bear, and I stayed in bed. Mr. Best heard of my illness. Though he was a member of the Christian Science Church, he asked me, since I was a Catholic, if I wanted him to call a doctor. I told him not to bother, that whatever I had contracted couldn't be too serious. Deep in my heart I knew that what I suffered was nothing other than a good case of love sickness.

I was so confused I missed two weeks of drawing lessons. Dolly, from time to time stopped by to see if she could be of help. She often brought me food. And there were times when she exercised her Irish wit and temper. "So! You're going to lay in bed forever? Up and at 'em!" she would shout.

One day she stood beside my cot, her eyes aglow with mischief. "I think I can cure your illness," she said. There was something in her face that made me tremble. Quickly she undressed and crept into my bed and lay beside me. And, after a while my fever went

away.

As the days passed, my memories of Madeleine increased. Life became a haunting experience, one that I found unable to fully understand. Once I went to the factory with the hope of catching a glimpse of her. I even walked into the stamping department. I was told that she no longer worked there.

Finally I gave up the drama. Once the drama ended, the comedy began. I repeat comedy, because what occurred during the following month could well be termed as comedy. I was still haunted by my love affair with Madeleine, still conscious of her flowering beauty, even though there were times when the whole affair seemed senseless. And to ease the pain, I even laughed about it, and believed that I must seek a way out of my present dilemma.

Adventures at Sea

ANGELO: On a morning in April, 1916, I chanced to pass by the office of the Union Fishing Co., which was located on Grant Avenue near Broadway in Chinatown. Men, young and old, were standing in line on the sidewalk, waiting to enroll as fishermen on the schooners that sailed to northern waters, where codfish was in abundance. They were a crowd of mixed nationalities, mostly of Italian origin, some Swedes, Norwegians and some Chinese.

To this day I cannot explain the sudden impulse that caused me to attach my name to a document that would bring about an unforeseen, unfortunate adventure.

During my interview with a heavy-built Swede who sat behind a desk littered with papers, I was asked the following questions:

"How old are you?"

"Nineteen years of age, sir."

He looked at me seriously. "You don't look that old. Born where?"

"I was born in Massarosa, Tuscany, Italy."

"A dago, eh?"

"No sir. An Italian—a Tuscan Italian."

He frowned while scrutinizing my body. "You're pretty skinny, you know? Are you strong?"

"Yes sir. I don't eat much but I'm pretty strong."

"Your mother and father's name?"

I gave him my parents' names and address. I also volunteered to tell him that I had been on fishing schooners many times before.

"Oh yeh?" His eyes were two question marks. "Where? May I ask?"

"In Antioch, California. There are three big schooners anchored there, across the river, near Sherman Island," I said.

He looked at me and roared with laughter. "Oh, those," he said finally. "Those old tubs have been out of commission for years." He continued, "Have you ever fished before?"

"Yes sir!"

"Where?"

"In the San Joaquin River. There's barrels of all kinds of fish there. I caught carp, bass, minnows, and tons of catfish—all sizes."

He laughed then, shook his head and gazed at me very seriously. "Are you sure you want to join this crew of fishermen? Are you sure you can stand the gaff? It's not going to be a picnic, you know." He scratched his bushy red hair, chewed the end of his pencil, all the while waiting for an answer, to which at the moment I could find no immediate solution. I gazed around at some of the characters that sat on benches; rough, tough, middle-aged, bearded men and cocksure young men who smoked cigarettes, all using a language that was new to me—a jargon of the sea, one that I would later grow accustomed to. I was momentarily in a state of confusion. In fact the more I thought of this sudden change in my life the more I delayed an answer. During the past this had not been so. I had always been quick in my decisions.

The words of Albert Svensen drew me out of my trance. "You better think about it," he said kindly. "There's time. We don't sail until a week from today." He glanced at the calendar. "That's right. Now, go home. Think about it. I wouldn't want you to get yourself into a lot of trouble."

I liked Mr. Albert Svensen very much. I liked his fatherly advice very much, too. But the devil must have been behind me that day, because I didn't listen to his advice. Stories of adventure I had read during my younger years began to come alive and flood my mind.

The heroes of George Henty, Jack London, Horatio Alger, Mark Twain, and the countless heroes in dime novels, all paraded before me as I lay on my cot that night, thinking of the days ahead aboard the schooner. There was bound to be adventure—or was I just searching for an escape? Would the image of Madeleine ever fade away? And as fancies most always occupied my mind, it came about that on the following morning I returned to the employment office of the Union Fishing Co.

Mr. Svensen was not surprised. However, before he allowed me to sign the working papers he gave me a last bit of fatherly advice. "Always keep your nose clean. Keep away from trouble. If you need help go to the captain. He's the Almighty on board his ship. He's the judge and jury of any problems that may arise."

I thanked him for his kind advice. He shook my hand, and for a moment examined it. He smiled. "It's not the hand of a fisherman," he said quietly.

"I'm going to be an artist, sir," I replied.

To the imaginative man in the modern world some things become sharply defined. Life is divided in two parts and, no matter how long one may live or where one may live, the two parts continue to dangle, fluttering about in empty air. To which of the two lives lived are you to give yourself? After all, there is a choice.

There is the life of fancy. In it one sometimes lives with an ordered purpose. In the life of fancy there is no such thing as good or evil. What is beautiful must bring aesthetic joy; what is ugly must bring sadness and suffering.

But there are also dreams to dream. And I, still in my searching youth, was determined to find the one that would enhance my life.

The *Silver Dolphin*, a wooden, three-masted schooner, lay at anchor in Richardson Bay near Sausalito. Huge warehouses stretched along the shoreline of the bay. A dense fog hung over the Marin hills, and the peaked cap of Mount Tamalpais was seen above a blanket of shifting fog.

I had left the key to my studio in the care of Mr. Best, who was sorry to see me go. There was a party to celebrate my departure. All of my new-found friends donated sandwiches and wine. There were moments of joy and moments of sadness. Dolly, the model, who was always frank with me, was saddened by the thought of me dwelling so far away in the icy lands of Alaska. She joked, "Maybe you'll meet a nice young Eskimo girl. I've heard they are very good cooks and lovable." After the party was over I felt as though I had been abandoned.

It was 9:00 a.m. by my dollar Ingersoll watch when the *Silver Dolphin*, towed by a tugboat, made its way out of Richardson Bay. The ship's crew was already aloft, and had begun the task of unfurling the canvas on the square yards. There was considerable pulling and adjusting, scrambling about and some cursing—all of which resembled a monkey circus.

To the east, Alcatraz, San Francisco, Yerba Buena Island, Berkeley, Oakland and the green hills of Contra Costa lay bathed in silvery mist. The sun was copper red. Screaming seagulls followed the ship, for the ship's cook was throwing breakfast kitchen slop over the side.

Slowly the ship was towed past Fort Mason and through the Golden Gate. There was a strong wind, with choppy waters. It wasn't long before the towline was dropped, amid shouts of, "Take her away—she's all yours. Good luck!" The captain, a red-bearded,

heavysset man of middle years, dressed in a mackinaw and boots, waved the tug away. The fishermen had gone below.

I stood on the stern deck and, as the ship, now under full sail, made her way north, a sudden, strange feeling of loneliness possessed me. The Golden Gate seemed a thousand miles away. My eyes were moist and the landscape along the shoreline a blurred apparition. With all my heart I longed to be back in San Francisco. At that moment the ship did not exist. I was suddenly shocked out of my trance by the touch of a hand on my shoulder. It was Albert Svensen, the man who had hired me.

He grinned. "Well," he said. "If you had wings you could fly." He laughed then. "And, since you don't have wings, I think you had better stay with the ship."

Such moments of happiness are seldom experienced. Moments when the voices in your mind are hushed, and words are hard to find. Suddenly I was ashamed of my weakness, and began to laugh.

"That's better," said Albert Svensen, the second mate of the *Silver Dolphin*.

It was one of the best moments of my life. I felt free and glad. I had made a friend.

The large room near the bow of the ship reminded me of my journey from Italy to America in steerage. There were bunks, some piled over the other, and a few hammocks strung to upright supports. The odor of salt and tar predominated the atmosphere of the interior. Kerosene lanterns were the only source of light. And there was a long table where men could sit and talk, play cards and sometimes quarrel.

My first dinner in the mess room is one I will long remember. The fare served was met not without some criticism. "What? Pork and beans again?"

It was a noisy group of diners. Polite insults could be heard occasionally. "Pass the salt, you son of a so-and-so!" Or, "Is this slop the best the cook can cook?" And some carried hip bottles from which they sipped from time to time.

The unpredictable, everlasting movement of the ship during the voyage was not new to me. My journey across the Atlantic, on the steamer *Lepanto*, had been at times smooth sailing, but under full sail in a heavy sea, the *Silver Dolphin* became a merciless, leaping, rolling, bouncing, uncontrollable monster. Huge waves splashed over the bow and pounded against her sides. It was then one had to hold on tight to anything at hand. Trying to sleep at night became a nightmare. There were times when I thought the ship would roll on its side and remain there. And there were temperate days of sunshine, a steady breeze, when whales and dolphins followed the ship, and cheerful voices mixed with those of the constant music from the ship's rigging.

Days followed, days of waiting. Along with others I walked around the deck. One day I remember well. It was Sunday. The sea was very calm. The sails hung limp, the rigging ceased its singsong music, and there appeared overhead seagulls squawking loudly. The ship was well out to sea, but a faint outline of land could be seen. The second mate told me that we were abreast Puget Sound.

The captain was dressed in his Sunday clothes. He called a congregation of those on board to midships for prayers. It was a motley gathering, I remember, for many of the fishermen had stayed up late playing cards and drinking. It had been a custom of the captain to read a prayer and recite various psalms from the Holy Bible. Despite the difference in religion, even the Chinese attended, and the Italians always knelt during the Lord's Prayer.

Sunday dinner, compared to what my mother cooked, was very poor. Meat had to be kept in barrels along with hams and bacon, which was the predominant fare on board the ship. It was poor fare for Italians accustomed to macaroni, spaghetti, ravioli and well-seasoned roasts. The cook always complained, "It's impossible to keep everybody happy." There were days when the cook became very irritable and refused to cook another pot of beans. His specialty was baked beans and fried potatoes. The bread he baked was the best I ever tasted. For breakfast, oatmeal mush was the specialty. One day I ate too many baked beans and

was very sick.

Some of my evenings I spent in the second mate's cabin listening to his wild adventures during his boyhood in Sweden. I often exchanged experiences of my childhood life in Tuscany. One evening he told me of the many sailing ships he had served on. To prove his seamanship he unbuttoned his woolen shirt, displayed the largest tattoo I had ever seen, of a schooner under full sail, all executed in bright swirling colors. "How about that for art?" he laughed.

I was fascinated by the artistry of the tattoo. In a moment of weakness, coupled with envy, I got myself tattooed. It came about in this manner.

On board the ship there was an old Greek fisherman who was known to be the finest tattooer in the business. He was a gentle person, with a sunburnt complexion that verged on the color of copper. Despite the cold weather, he always wore a short-sleeved woolen sweater. His arms were illuminated with an assortment of colorful images which spread over his hands. I tried to imagine what might exist on the remainder of his body and gave up.

It was a simple operation. I wanted a tattoo. I drew several designs on paper. They were all too complicated, so I finally settled on a monogram. A cross with a star beneath it, and two letters "V.A.," one on each side of the cross. To this day I well remember what agony that little work of art caused me. That night my right arm began to swell, the needle pricks to burn. All night I tossed and turned in my bunk. The pain became unbearable. I crawled out of my bunk and once up on deck paced nervously, holding my St. Anthony's medal, for relief. The sailor at the helm noticed me. I remember the full moon on that night. The image on it seemed to be unaware of my predicament, for the moon seemed to be in a fit of laughter. I stopped at the helm.

The helmsman said, "Not sleepy, hey?"

I replied, "Not sleepy." I wanted to tell him all about my predicament but was embarrassed and ashamed. Besides, my arm was on fire with pain. "Have you ever been tattooed?" I finally asked.

The helmsman coughed then said, "Sure. Why do you ask?"

"Did it hurt much? Did it swell?"

"Like the devil," he replied. "Like this?" I exposed my swollen arm.

He looked at my tattoo, then laughed. "That little thing! That's nothing. Wait'll you have a big one done!"

I didn't have a bigger one done, and to this day I still regret having the little one.

The following day was spent cursing myself. Gradually my arm returned to normal. That year had been one of transition for me—so much of my life lay ahead, so much to be learned. Every day I added new drawings of scenes on board the ship, men at work, loitering, parts of the ship's deck structures, heaps of dories, and some imaginative compositions which kept some of the crew puzzled and asking endless questions. Some of the ship's crew wanted their portraits drawn, for which I received twenty-five cents. There were times when the ship cruised close to the shore where the landscape was mountainous and covered with many shades of gray, olive green and sometimes banked in patches of snow. The sky was always a deep aquamarine blue. And there were times when sea lions and seals basked in the bright sunlight of a sandy shore.

The fishermen had begun to fish over the side with hook and sinker lines. More seagulls gathered around the ship. From that day on we had codfish or mullet almost every day for dinner.

There was a heavy run of fish, and the men were kept busy. I, too, was kept busy. I became a head chopper, which at first I found to be a repulsive operation and a messy one. The second mate gave me an oilskin apron to wear over my corduroy trousers. There were moments when I wished I was in San Francisco working at the American Can Company. The run of cod proved unusually fruitful at this particular latitude, and the fishermen made the most of it. They had become bored during the last few days of leisure. And some had drunk too much.

On the following day the fishing continued. The ship had dropped anchor, and dories were employed. Two men occupied a dory, fished, and returned to the ship with the catch, which was hoisted aboard in baskets. I was kept busy chopping off heads of codfish. The man next to me was a splitter who gutted the cod. The process was almost automatic. After the fish was cleaned, the salter stored it away in a section of the hold. He worked on his knees by candlelight, spreading the salt over each layer of fish. The captain was the overseer of all the operations. He was the tallier and made a record of each man's catch, and the number of dories used. Some of the fishermen kept their own records.

After six days of fishing, the run lessened, and the ship sailed northward. The weather grew colder, and my mackinaw was put to good use. It wasn't long before my appearance induced flattering remarks from the fishermen. Some said, "A real dandy, that one. Hey?" The following morning I went to the storeroom to buy an oilskin overcoat, but the second mate had an extra, which he gladly let me use. It was too large but it didn't matter. So I bought a broad-rim oilskin hat. All I needed now was a pair of boots—which I acquired on the following day—a gift from the old Greek fisherman and tattooist. After that I was considered, at least in appearance, a full-fledged cod fisherman.

The further north we sailed, the colder the weather. During the night I slept in my woolen mackinaw, kept my woolen socks on, and still I shivered. During the day I kept active when not occupied, by running a race around the ship's deck. It was springtime but the landscape along the shore was one of a violent winter. Snow-covered mountains and expansive fields of ice and snow covered the land as far as the eye could see. Seals, sea lions became more evident along the rugged coastline. And the sun seemed to rise and set as I had never seen it do before. There was hardly any daylight. We sailed, still taking a northern route. One day we spotted a steamer heading north. The second mate said it was a supply ship, but he wasn't sure.

The head fisherman continued his testing in search of larger schools of fish. Finally the ship dropped anchor within the bounds of a semi-circular harbor, which proved to be the best fishing ground we had encountered. The fish were so plentiful that sometimes meals were delayed. It was a treasure ground of the finest and largest codfish that was found in those waters. There was also mullet, halibut and large herring.

One morning a quarrel developed between two Sicilians fishing in a dory a short distance away from the ship. I could see one of them struggling to take away a knife from the other. The small dory rocked and rolled. Other dories close by stopped fishing and looked on. The struggle between the two men ended when one of them was pushed overboard. I could see a red smear of blood on the fisherman's face who was still aboard the dory, while the fisherman overboard thrashed about in the water shouting for help. The wounded man sat in the dory and nursed his wound. There were shouts from the captain, who was always on the lookout for anything that might happen among his crew and the fishermen who often got drunk if they were overworked. Most quarrels, however, were results of poor losers during a card game.

The fisherman was rescued and taken on board by a nearby dory. The wounded man remained in his dory, still nursing the bleeding cut on his right cheek. It was learned later that the quarrel had been relative to a family affair between the two fishermen—a case of jealousy.

That evening the captain took the two men to his cabin where he informed them that matters of family affairs should be better settled ashore.

I had heard all about family feuds and vendettas among the people in Sicily and throughout southern Italy. The two men finally complied with the law aboard the ship but were never again, as I recall, seen fishing together in a dory.

The odor of fish, as the work continued, grew stronger every day. Though the deck beneath the cutting tables was washed down every night, the odor remained. Perhaps the stink had gotten into my

senses. It had been almost a month since I left San Francisco.

One day a strange fatigue had invaded my mind, and from day to day persisted. I struggled on. Too, I had lost my appetite for much the same daily menu. I so longed for some of my mother's cooking, or even some of the food I used to cook. Soon I began to feel like a misfit, occupied with work I no longer enjoyed, and the coming on of inertia kept me nervous and worried. All the while I was unaware that Albert Svensen, the second mate, was keeping a close observance on my behavior.

One morning I was so ill, every part of my body seemed on fire. The temperature in the sleeping quarters was usually cold, yet I perspired so badly my body and blankets were drenched, and there were spasms of uncontrollable trembling, so bad at times that my teeth chattered. Whatever it was I had contracted, I tried to fight and overcome it. I made several attempts to rise to a sitting position, finally succeeded and sat on the edge of my bunk. My eyes blurred and I became so dizzy that I laid down. I was all alone. I looked at my watch. The bunkroom was empty. Faintly I could hear voices from above, and I knew the fishermen were at work. Weird thoughts entered my mind. I tried to remember what could have possibly caused this sudden illness. It couldn't have been something eaten the night before. If that was the case, why weren't the fishermen ill?

Something was being pushed up inside of me, so that I began to tremble with an anxiety I had never known before. It had nothing to do with my fear of the sea, the ship and the people around me. Suddenly I wanted to be back in San Francisco with my friends again. I felt like a little island, alone in a vast troubled sea. I wanted so badly to have someone near me. Suddenly the light in the room turned black. I remember calling for help, but my voice sounded no louder than a whisper.

I woke up suddenly to find the second mate and the ship's doctor, a small man wearing a black suit and silver-rimmed spectacles. He held my hand, taking my pulse, looking at his watch.

Albert Svensen was deeply concerned. He tried to joke, as was his usual manner, but hesitated. I was so glad to see him that I suddenly lost all sense of speech and stammered, "I, I, I'm sorry, sir."

The second mate smiled. "It's all right. Relax." He took the doctor aside. They talked. The doctor's voice was barely audible. "It seems to be a case of influenza. I'll give him a dose of quinine. That'll help. He seems awfully young and delicate to be involved in this kind of work." He gave the second mate instructions. "I'll drop in to see him from time to time. Tell the men to keep clear of him. We don't want an epidemic on board this ship." One morning every part of me awakened. Somewhere in the following days I stopped being hot and cold and I was not frightened again. During those periods the fishermen remained quieter than usual. The quinine was working—and so were my bowels. It must have been the beef broth the cook kept feeding me, for I too frequently made my way to the toilet room.

One meets people every day; you forget their names, their ways, their faces. Occasionally, you meet persons you remember, perhaps remember them the rest of your life. Such a rare individual was Albert Svensen, the second mate on the *Silver Dolphin*.

The day when I had fully recovered, when he took me to his cabin and told me that the captain had arranged for my leaving the ship—I carried a lump in my throat for three days after. I felt relieved to hear him say, "In our own life, one must allow some margin for errors." And the trip to Alaska was only one of many mistaken adventures I would experience throughout my life.

With the thought of soon returning to San Francisco I became a new person. I continued chopping off codfish heads faster than I had ever done before.

With the *Silver Dolphin*, along with two other fishing vessels which had recently arrived, the catch lessened daily, until one morning we moved further south in search for new waters to explore. It was the height of the fishing season. More and more schooners arrived, some from Russian waters, some from Japan, but most were from California.

A week later Albert Svensen informed me that the *Ramona*, a supply steamer, was cruising our way. The captain had been able to make contact with that ship by Morse telegraph; had given him our position in latitude and longitude by code as to our whereabouts.

Blessed be all the saints. Miracles do happen. On that day I kissed my St. Anthony medal at least a dozen times.

The day the supply ship that was to carry me back to San Francisco reached the *Silver Dolphin*, I began to experience misgivings about my departure. I was tormented by a strange feeling of guilt. Was I acting wisely or foolishly? A contract had been signed. The more I thought of the matter the more muddled I became. Was I a coward? What about responsibility?

Albert Svensen assured me in his usual humorous way. "Go, go, go. Don't worry about it. Become a great artist. It is a far better occupation."

My departure, especially from the second mate, was a memorable one. We exchanged elaborate good wishes for the future of our lives. And when words became sentimental, I told myself to shut up. He was one of the many friends I was privileged to know and understand in years to come.

My return voyage to San Francisco on board the steamer was an uneventful one. A good deal of my time was spent drawing and devising plans for my future.

Earning a Living in San Francisco Again

ANGELO: On my return to San Francisco from Alaska, I continued my art studies at Best's Art School in the evenings three nights a week. During my absence some new students had enrolled with whom I became acquainted. One was John Argens, who became a well known cartoonist for *The San Francisco Examiner*. He was a close companion of the famous cartoonist Rube Goldberg, who was then a member of the *Examiner* staff. I recall having many visits with them.

During the day I worked in various factories in the Mission District. The Illinois glass works* is one that comes vividly to mind because of the kind of work I did there.

The place was as hot as I imagine Hades might be. Huge kilns of molten glass were all kept at a fahrenheit suitable for glass manipulation into molds—for demijohns from five-gallon size to quarts and pints. The operation was performed by deep-chested men, mostly Negroes, who used a metal staff which was placed through an opening in the kiln—twirled to contain a lump of molten glass, withdrawn red-hot and quickly placed into a mold, then blown into shape. How they kept the intense heat from scorching their mouths still remains a mystery to me. They were the highest paid workers in the system.

The small rotating automatic glass-blowing machine at which I worked was indeed a fantastic invention. It was my job to keep its rotating molds filled with lumps of molten glass which I picked up from a tray with tweezers: open the mold, take out a finished bottle, fill the mold, close it. It took me five days of sweat and tension to get used to this infernal machine. Some of the workmen even congratulated me. "The last fella," said one Negro smiling, "he went nuts. We had to let him go." I did not wait that long. After three months of torture I quit. I still have a feeling that some of the workmen there were disappointed at my persistent sanity.

My next adventure at earning my living was less dangerous. I was hired by the Mission Chimney and Boiler Works as an apprentice and helper to a riveter. Considerable repair work on smokestacks and boilers of all sorts was done there. The man to whom I was apprenticed was a sturdy Hungarian, who, in order to make a favorable impression on his employer, kept his men working at a nerve-wracking pace. He cursed them into being more efficient. "You want the boss to go broke?" he would shout.

* Illinois-Pacific Glass Company

Since I was small in stature and could crawl into tight spaces, I was always eligible to perform the "dirty work"—such as holder-on to a riveter.

Sitting in a cramped position inside an old metal smokestack, about three feet in diameter, and feeding red-hot rivets into a hole to a Mad Hungarian was not a labor of love. "Faster. Faster. Faster." Not to speak of the deafening noise I had to endure by the sound of the riveting apparatus. One day, however, my work there ended.

A huge boiler had been constructed and completed—all but an opening on its top, a round hole onto which a round metal collar would be riveted. It was late afternoon when the Mad Hungarian decided to rivet on the collar. I climbed upon the boiler, forced myself through the opening into the metal boiler. It was dark—all except the round hole above me that cast a faint light into it. Soon the round, cast-iron collar was hoisted into position over the hole, and a tin bucket filled with hot rivets was handed to me which raised the temperature inside the boiler. "Okay! Okay! Let's go. Hey you down there, move it. Give me rivets!"

I began to insert the rivets. The battering sound inside the boiler was deafening—my face was drenched with perspiration. Twice I dropped a rivet. The Mad Hungarian shouted down an endless chain of curses. I sat down, suddenly paralyzed by a strange claustrophobic fear. The shouting continued. Rising, I proceeded to place the hot rivets into the drilled holes. I struggled trying to control myself. I was growing more used to the dense atmosphere. There were only six more rivet holes to be filled. With renewed courage I struggled on. At last the ordeal ended. I was exhausted and sat down on the cold iron floor of the boiler. "Never again," I told myself as I gazed up at the round iron collar, from which issued a bright circle of golden light. "It must be nearing five o'clock. I'll be glad when I get home." I wasn't too certain of what new adventure the following day would bring. I wasn't even certain I wanted to return to work. "This is no way to become an artist," I told myself. The loud voice of the Hungarian brought me back to reality.

"Hey! You. Come out of there!"

I rose and handed him the empty bucket, then reached up and taking hold of the newly riveted iron collar I tried to lift myself up through it. No matter how hard I struggled there seemed no way which I was able to squeeze myself up through the hole. The Hungarian had suddenly disappeared. I called for help. Strange as it may seem, I did not panic. Instead I suddenly burst into uncontrollable laughter. My face was wet with tears. Between fits of laughter I called for help. It couldn't be quitting time. I hadn't heard the five o'clock bell. The iron collar was too high for me to look through. I kept shouting for help. I had sudden visions of spending the night in the boiler when Big Jim Callahan came to my rescue.

He looked at me seriously. "What's the matter, Angie?" he said.

"I can't get myself out of this thing," I replied.

"Well, I'll be darned," he chuckled. Then he burst into loud laughter. He tried to wedge me out.

It's no laughing matter, Jim," I said. "I'm just too big. Or, or the hole's too small."

"Ho, ho," he said. "Wait'll the Hungarian hears about this."

The bell indicating the end of the working day sounded like the day of doom. Jim Callahan too had suddenly disappeared. I waited and prayed for his return, dreading the coming night alone in the iron boiler.

Jim Callahan finally returned with the shop's chief mechanic, an elderly man who appeared very annoyed by the situation. However, at the sight of my perplexed condition his manner softened. He chuckled and smiled. "Don't worry, we'll get you out of there." He turned to Jim Callahan and winked, then looking down at me said, "It's after working hours, you know. You may have to spend the night in there. Most of the workers have left the shop."

I was speechless. I looked up at the two men. They were seriously talking in low tones.

The chief mechanic said, "We don't even have a blanket for you to sleep in."

"Oh?" I replied. "That's all right."

"Just don't you worry," said Jim Callahan. "We'll get you out of there. Even if we have to blast you out."

I felt somewhat relieved by his Irish humor, and hoped for the best. It was an hour later that he returned with a ham and cheese sandwich and a bottle of beer. He seemed to be in very high spirits. He introduced me to his friend, an Italian by the name of Salvatore, who spoke to me in Italian, asking me questions about my birthplace; his voice echoed, booming sounds around the interior of the boiler in which I was imprisoned.

They left the boiler assuring me that they would return soon. Meanwhile Jim Callahan brought an extension cord with a single light bulb, which was lowered into the hold of the boiler. "There! Now you'll be more comfortable. We'll be back soon. Then we'll get you out."

I knew they were heading for the saloon and lunch counter on Fremont Street, a short distance away. Somehow I had a premonition that I would spend the night in the boiler.

The occasional sounds of the city echoed in the boiler. A streetcar was heard rattling along, ringing its bell, mixed with the sounds of cars and trucks.

I sat and waited. The single light gave me assurance but no comfort. I thought of Jim Callahan and wondered how he would find a way. I was so exhausted by the lack of air that I had begun at intervals to doze only to be startled into wakefulness by the least sound from outside.

I was awakened suddenly out of a deep sleep by the tap-tapping sounds, which could be none other than those of hammers and chisels.

My heart lost a beat, but it was with joy. Jim's voice was quite apologetic. "Sorry, pal," he said. "It's only the night shift at work. We'll have you home before you know it. Hold on to your ears. And don't interrupt the rescue squad."

Amid considerable joking, grunts and laughter, Salvatore and Jim hacked away at the rivets. What I experienced, meanwhile, was an event that was to remain with me for the rest of my life. By midnight I was home in bed.

I will not go into details concerning my confrontation with the Mad Hungarian on the following morning. I noticed the boiler seemed unchanged—as if nothing at all had happened on the previous night. Had I dreamed it all? All I can remember is that Salvatore and Jim Callahan reported for work very exhausted, both nursing tremendous hangovers.

Jim Callahan and Salvatore said to me, "We got you out. We fooled the Mad Hungarian, didn't we?"

It came about that the Mad Hungarian could find no solution to the mystery of my deliverance from the boiler. All day he walked around the shop as though in a trance.

One day after an unpleasant experience with the Mad Hungarian, which I shall not divulge, I quit my job. Both Jim Callahan and Salvatore, when they heard of the affair, were intent on settling accounts with the Mad Hungarian. I thanked them for their thoughtfulness and hoped that some day we would all meet again. We never did.

TEISER: Would you tell me about your World War I work and being drafted?

ANGELO: My days were occupied trying to reach decisions that concerned my future. It was obvious I would be unable to support myself through my work as an artist. I too must join the army of workers occupied in the various industries operated by the government to support the war effort.

For a time I worked in Alameda at the navy yards, camouflaging newly constructed merchant ships. The work entailed painting huge abstract patterns in muted colors—such as gray, dull red, sky blue, et cetera—colors that somehow would deceive the captains of submarines and enemies' ships.

For a time I enjoyed the work. I recall that it was Peter Fredrickson and Gaskin who got me the work. We were well paid. But for the most part it was a dirty job. My clothes became so besplattered with colors that they began to appear more like distorted rainbows than clothes.

I received notice from the army to report for departure to training camp within two weeks. Because I was still an alien and had not yet received my final citizenship papers, the army had placed me in the class of 4F. The men in this class would be the last to be inducted into the army.

Most of my friends had enlisted. I had waited to be called. Every day brought news of the war to end all wars. I was twenty-one years of age. My mother and father were both against any sort of violence. My father had left Italy because of his fear of being inducted into military service. He had escaped to Brazil, I recall.

When he heard of my induction, there was no end to his anti-war sermons. "Besides, you're too young."

I made preparations to leave civilian life by spending a few days with my parents, before my departure to training camp. Perhaps I would be sent to France. I had always dreamed of some day going to France and perhaps to Italy too, perhaps to see the place of my birth. Who knows, by God's will, I may even return safely home.

I guess the Good Lord never intended for me to become a soldier.

I well remember that day. It was the day every mother and father had been waiting for. And I for one shall never forget it.

I had started to paint the roof on my parents' home. It was mid-morning, I recall. My mother had gone to town to shop. Suddenly I was startled by the sound of the siren on the paper mill nearby. At first I thought it might be a fire warning. Soon after, all the church bells in Antioch began to ring, including the school bell. "It must be some celebration," I thought. Then I saw my mother come running down the street. She yelled, "The war has ended! Thank God! The war

is over!"

Later that day I returned to San Francisco to learn that all those who had been notified to report to camp were not to do so until further notice.

TEISER: In your autobiographical memoir, you wrote that you worked part-time in hotels, restaurants and bakeries.

ANGELO: For three weeks I worked in my studio painting pictures and drawing. John Stoll, whose studio was next door to mine, often came in and we talked about art. I had been looking for work without success when he informed me of a job I might consider. It was a food checking job. One of the checkers had been drafted. "There'll be plenty to eat there," he told me. "All free too. It's at the St. Francis Hotel."

So it came about that I became a food checker, a position quite different from that of a boilermaker or a fisherman. John Stoll introduced me to the manager. I was hired. John Stoll, who had worked there for some time, gave me instructions. "Just watch me for a little while. It's easy."

I watched him. The food checkers in those days performed the task of checking the contents of a tray of food—breakfast, lunch, or dinner items of the day—by stamping with inked rubber stampers, the prices on each check which was handed to him by the waiter, on his way to serve a customer.

The first day I practiced until my fingers became all thumbs. Each rubber stamp is held between the fingers—four stamps on the left hand. Just to remember the price engraved on each stamp is an act that could only be performed and accomplished by a miracle man or a magician.

John Stoll was patient. I wanted the job and needed it badly. "Try again." First memorize the prices on the menu—then those on the rubber stamps. For the first three days I suffered hallucinations, all spelled out in forms of numerals. I had never been confronted with such a difficult task before in my life. The waiters became impatient. "Hurry. I can't keep 'em waiting." During the rush hour, all the waiters stood waiting in line, all dressed in black swallow-tailed uniforms, all breathing heavily, nervously tapping their

shoes, while I truly perspired, trying to locate the right rubber stamp containing the right price for broiled chicken or filet of sole, et cetera.

However, perseverance will prevail. After three days, with the aid of John Stoll, I had conquered another method of earning a living. During the course of two months working there, my weight increased fifteen pounds. It was all that free rich food of course.

TEISER: Would you tell about Charles Barrett? What kind of a photographer was he, and what kind of a person?

ANGELO: Charles Barrett, the photographer, occupied the studio vacated by Arnold Schroder. He was of endless help to me; became a sort of self-appointed guardian, fed me home-cooked meals, and often volunteered sound advice on all matters pertaining to my welfare. He overfed me clam chowder which was his specialty and which I disliked, but consumed it because it made him happy. He was a good-natured philosopher and his experimental work with the camera seemed endless. He was an admirer of the work of both Arnold Genthe and praised the work of Edward Steichen endlessly. He often confessed he would never attain the qualities in his work achieved by those two masters.

I learned later that he was related to the Lindbergh family. Our friendship was an enduring one. During evenings, after meals, he would ask me to pose for him. He was then experimenting with soft-focus lens—that gave the picture a pale, foggy appearance, which seemed the fashion in photography at that time.

There were times when he dressed me in various costumes. Sometimes I was a cowboy, a gypsy, or an artist holding a brush and palette, dressed in a smock, wearing a beret. And there were times when he worked solely for facial expressions. It all came about because from time to time I posed for the art class, whenever a male model or Dolly were not available.

I recall that Mr. Barrett once rescued me from one deplorable character who frequently visited the studio building. His name was Sadakichi Hartmann, a sophisticated, eccentric genius and self-appointed poet. He often gave candlelight poetry readings in the old Verdier mansion on Taylor Street on Russian Hill. He

was also a brilliant authority on Chinese and Japanese art, and wrote various books on the subjects. He was a tall, thin man, with facial features that were so mixed that one was unable to determine his nationality. I learned that he was part German and part Oriental. And, he was very fond of gin.

Since most doors in the building had the resident's name and profession painted on them, I decided that I too must display my profession as an artist. It was quite a work of art. The name and occupation sounded rather important. "Valenti Michael Angelo, Artist," was painted in bold red letters. All the other names were painted in black. Of course my name was painted bright red.

I think it was the red color that got under Sadakichi's skin, for one night I was awakened by shouting and pounding on my door. "How dare you call yourself Michael Angelo! Come out, you little dago. I want to have a word with you!" He pounded on the door. Rattled the door knob so violently that he woke up the tenants. Davy Davenport, Mr. Barrett, and even timid Mr. Charles Grant woke up to protest. I stayed behind my door shivering with fright. I could hear Davy's voice trying to pacify Sadakichi. Mr. Barrett threatened to call the police. Finally, after considerable, gentle coaxing Sadakichi, accompanied by Davenport, left the building. On the following day I scraped off the sign, repainted it, leaving out the Michael. The sign then read just plain Valenti Angelo, Studio No. 4.

I continued my work at the St. Francis Hotel, but not as a food checker, but as a baker's apprentice.

Victor Hertzler, who was chef, had been interested in some of the decorative designs I had been creating during slack periods in my work as a food checker. One day he asked me to decorate a special cake for a special banquet. Of course I felt flattered.

The idea that a novice like me could undertake such a task seemed to me rather ridiculous. I had previously spent some time, during slack periods, in the pastry shop which was annexed to the huge kitchen, and had watched the bakers shape and decorate cakes and create beautiful candy baskets. I had even hoped

and dreamed that someday I too would become a pastry chef. And it came about that the cake, the one I was allowed to decorate, became such a work of art that I received encouragement from all quarters. No wonder. I had created a veritable five-storied, columned, complete with arches, "Tower of Babel," all with various colored sugar fondant. All executed with a small funnel spout.

Those days were happy ones indeed. Besides making cookies and cakes I also learned the delicate art of constructing beautiful candy baskets out of colored sugar candies. These were generally used as ornamental pieces that were filled with an assortment of cookies.

There were days when the bakery sounded more like an opera house, for the French, German and Italian pastry cooks sang together arias from *La Boheme*, *Tosca* or the tragic opera, *Pagliacci*, each taking his turn in the drama.

The maker of ice cream was a man called Slim Whitfield. He had at one time been connected with the Ringling Brothers circus as a clown. He was well over six feet tall with a face like that of a hawk, and a very long nose. He was also a contortionist, and the many ways in which he was able to twist his body were miraculous to behold.

There was Victor Vineys, a French-Italian pastry chef who boasted of having served in households of Swiss millionaires.

There was also a very old Frenchman who came every day from Fairfax just to bake rolls. He was known to us all as "Papa." He was at least eighty years old. He had been with the hotel for many years and crossed the bay by ferry.

It was shortly after I entered my apprenticeship in the pastry shop that I met Mrs. [Leopold] Michaels, a long time tenant of the hotel. She had a suite of rooms on the top floor with windows facing Union Square. She was one of the finest old women I had ever met. She was on a diet and a small, special kind of bread had to be baked for her every day. It was my duty to make and bake it, after which I would deliver it to her apartment.

The pastry chef always inspected my clothes before I made the delivery. "You better change that apron —and straighten up your hat." (We always wore those white mushroom-shaped hats.) A clean handkerchief, a white jacket, and blue and white pin striped trousers with polished shoes.

I always looked forward to seeing the old woman. She was slender, with a wrinkled face and eyes, despite her age, that seemed to twinkle. She had a very friendly, patient voice. Her apartment was filled with art treasures, books and all sorts of family portraits including the work of many artists. To me it was like a small museum. Sometimes she detained me, asking questions about my family life. She had traveled around the world and spoke highly of the Italian people and their artistic achievements. Before leaving her apartment she always gave me a one dollar tip.

One day I ventured to show her a small portfolio of drawings I had selected from what I thought was my best work. She was very impressed and insisted that I continue my studies. "Some day you will be a great artist."

Studies, Marriage, and Commercial Art

TEISER: What did you study at the Mark Hopkins Institute? Were there some teachers who particularly influenced you?

ANGELO: At the Mark Hopkins Institute I studied life drawing and painting from Spencer Macky. Lee Randolph was dean of the school at the time, and he taught portraiture, an art I was not interested in at that time.

I also took some lessons from Rudolph Schaeffer during his courses on color theories, which was at the time being employed by interior decorators, and artists in posters, and some work in the then fashionable medium known as batik—a process widely practiced in Java.

I don't think any of my teachers' work had an influence on me. During my childhood in Italy, I had been exposed to considerable art of the Italian Renaissance masters. I think this had an influence in my later work as illustrator and painter. And to this day I still employ this direct, simple style of delineation in most of my work, whether it be painting, illustrating, woodcuts or sculpture.

TEISER: Would you tell about meeting your wife, marrying, and living on Macondray Lane?

ANGELO: I met my wife at a party on Macondray Lane. It was a party celebrating William Gaskin's birthday. Most of the people there were students of the arts. Gaskin was a painter very much interested in the work of the French and German modern artists of the time. He had been to France during his service as a radiologist in the navy. We became friends. Through him I learned much about art.

Meeting Maxine Grimm that evening brought about a complete change in my life. It turned out to be somewhat of a wild party with dancing and considerable beer and wine to keep up our spirits. I found my companion to be different than other girls I had previously met, and on that night when the party came to an end, it was I who escorted her home. She lived with her parents in Oakland. It was 2:00 a.m. by the time we reached her home. I don't remember how long we sat on the front porch talking. But I did get back to San Francisco in time to go to work at my newly acquired job, as an apprentice at the Commercial Art and Engraving Company.

After a year of courtship we were married on July 23, 1923. We rented a flat on Macondray Lane and lived there for a year. The lane was indeed a haven for artists and writers. It was there that we met Joan London, George Burkhardt, Charles Bliel, Peter Fredricksen, William Gaskin and of course the Cadenasso family, and many others. A theatre was started in a basement for which I constructed a small stage. Many performances, amateur I mean, were given there. Matthew Barnes was one of the regular actors.

I recall one performance in which Barnes played the part of an intoxicated man going through delirium tremens. That was the night the audience was practically asphyxiated by the fumes from a large open charcoal burner used to keep the basement warm. It almost brought an end to all of us. After that event the charcoal burner was never used again.

My own contribution as an actor consisted of a few performances. One I particularly enjoyed was a short play by Christopher Morley titled *East of Eden*, a fable about Adam and Eve and their first-born son Enoch. That night, wearing only a sheepskin pelt over my naked body, was one I'll never forget, for it was a cold winter that year. Later, when I moved to New York I had the pleasure of becoming acquainted with Morley. He told me that that was probably the first and last performance his play had ever had.

I could write many stories about Macondray Lane.*

TEISER: Would you tell about working at the Commercial Art and Engraving Company?

ANGELO: I remember my first visit to the Commercial Art and Engraving Company. It was situated on Third Street near Market and was known to be the first technically advanced engraving plant in San Francisco.

I was a budding artist then, experimenting with various mediums—pen and ink, lettering, poster work, et cetera.

After making a large portfolio of various examples of my work, I left Macondray Lane one early morning in high spirits, feeling joyful at the prospect of securing employment and thereby conquering a position in the world of art.

As I climbed the stairs to the establishment on the third floor my excitement lessened. A turmoil of questions and answers clouded my mind. "Would my work speak for itself? Was it good?" Then, before proceeding further, I opened my portfolio and, looking over my work, convinced myself that my work was

* See also pp. 109-110.

good—or just as good as other work I had seen.

I reached the office. There was a strong odor in the air that was new to me. It was the odor of acid. I reached the long counter and placed my portfolio upon it. Around the walls hung examples of the firm's work.

I looked over my work and waited for the miracle to occur.

Two men sat at a desk facing each other. One was young and neatly dressed in a gray suit, and wore silver-rimmed glasses. The man opposite him I learned later was his father—a tall, handsome, dignified, fair-faced type that might be mistaken for a country squire. The two men continued to talk, unaware of my presence. Finally the young man looked at me and smiled but continued talking. There seemed no end to their conversation. I thought they were playing a joke on me. Bolstering up my courage, I coughed loudly and addressed them.

"Excuse me," I said. "Which one of you is the art director? I have some examples of my work I would like to show you." I wasn't too sure I had made the right move, when the two men approached the counter.

The father and son looked over my work. The elder said, "I've seen some of your watercolors at the Gumps' galleries. They're good."

"Yes sir," I said. "Sometimes I sell one or two. But I need work connected with art."

The young man said, "We do need an apprentice, Father." After a short consultation the elder man spoke.

"You may begin to work tomorrow morning," said Mr. William Blatchly. "Your salary will start at ten dollars a week," he smiled. "See you tomorrow at eight o'clock. Report to our art director. His name is Mike Harris." As I descended the stairs I pondered on many things. Ten dollars a week seemed unfair. I had made three times that much working in the factories. At last I tightened my belt and faced the facts. I could at least call myself a practicing commercial artist.

Homeward I sped on winged feet, my heart pounding with joy. The following day would be the most important day of my life.

I did not know it then but I was to spend four years of my life working for that firm.

During my work at the Commercial Art and Engraving Company, I learned how to become a commercial artist; that is, I learned to execute lettering for labels, showcards, et cetera. I also learned the photo-engraving processes, from black and white reproduction to that of color. Also, I learned how to apply Ben Day tints to metal zinc plates. I also executed window display cutouts in color. One that was popular with the Fuller paint company* was that of a bearded miner attired in a bright red flannel shirt, wearing a turned-up hat, who also carried a pick over one shoulder. I invented many cutout displays for this company—men painting houses, boats, et cetera. The paint company's trademark was often seen in high places depicting a can of paint spilling over a globe—with a motto, "Fuller Paints Cover the Earth."

It was a year after I worked there that the firm began to produce engravings for high school and college annuals. I was kept busy designing and illustrating these books. Some of them, like the U. of C. *Blue and Gold* and Stanford University [*Quad*] were quite elaborate, containing pictures of scenes of the campuses.

Some of the employees of the firm I remember quite well. I was always addressed by them as either Angie or Mike Angelo. During the slack season, which occurred in the winter, I kept busy painting and drawing. Mr. William Blatchly, senior, always encouraged me in my endeavors. He often took me to lunch at the Bohemian Club, which then was a great treat for me.

On weekends my wife and I spent considerable time in Marin County, hiking and drawing the scenery there. Life was beginning to have a real meaning. We were happy.

*W.P. Fuller & Co.

Beginning a Career as a Book Illustrator

TEISER: Anne Englund wrote* that Barrett took you to see a Grabhorn exhibit in 1926. Where was that exhibit, and what was in it? Was that the first you knew of the Grabhorn brothers' work?

ANGELO: It was after Mr. Barrett took me to see an exhibition of the printed books by the Grabhorn Press that my interest in books was revived. The exhibition was held at the newly opened Legion of Honor** museum. I had never known about this printing establishment. My contact with printers had been more or less with commercial printers who did college annuals in large editions. From that day on I began to collect books. I discovered Newbegin's book store on Post Street, a store that displayed fine editions, both foreign and domestic. Every Saturday found me, and my pay check, searching for new items to add to my growing collection of books. I continued my work at the Commercial Art and Engraving Co., and began to make illustrations for various stories. These were done in colored inks, a medium I thought appropriate and very effective for use as book illustrations. A series of stylized pictures was done for Oscar Wilde's *Salome*. These were exhibited in the Gumps' galleries, and created quite a fanfare. The newspapers stirred up sensational reports about the discovery of a new young talent. For a time I was deluged by praise.

The first commission was from Robert Gump, the youngest member of the Gump establishment, dealers in oriental art. It was a series of full-page illustrations for *The Sphinx Without a Secret* by Oscar Wilde, which was inserted into an unillustrated edition of Wilde's book. Robert Gump was a very generous patron of my work. I can safely say it was he who sponsored exhibitions of my work for many years. Somewhere out in the world there is an individual copy of the first fine book I ever illustrated. It was *The Sphinx Without a Secret* that helped pave my way toward becoming an illustrator of fine books.

* See Appendix One.

** California Palace of the Legion of Honor.

My work at the Commercial became so monotonous that as time went on I was convinced that this was not the object of my long search for an artistic fulfillment. However, my work there contributed much to my knowledge of the many different photo-engraving processes involved in the field of graphic arts.

TEISER: Would you describe your first meeting with the Grabhorn brothers? What was your first impression of them and their press?

ANGELO: My good friend Charles Barrett was responsible for my next move and good fortune. One day after we had put together a portfolio of my work, he accompanied me to the Grabhorn Press, which was then located in the new Ray Coyle building on Powell Street near Sutter Street. He introduced me to the Grabhorns.

I was somewhat apprehensive meeting two famous people who were master printers.

The Grabhorn brothers, Edwin, the elder, and Robert, the younger, looked at examples of work I had executed during my employment at the engraving house for college and high school annuals. They told me that they were familiar with some of my color work, and some paintings I had shown in group shows at the Gumps' galleries and in group shows at the Legion of Honor, but were not familiar with my work as illustrator. They were particularly interested in my rendering of Oscar Wilde's *Salome*. "Now, that one," said Robert Grabhorn, "would make a stunning frontispiece for a modern edition of *Salome*."

"I agree," said Edwin. "We've been thinking of printing an edition of *Salome* for a long time." He looked at another example, an illustration executed in the woodcut style of the early Renaissance period which I had copied from a reproduction, but in a somewhat simplified modern style.

"That one," said Robert, "would be a good style for an Italian story."

After they had reviewed my work, Edwin brought out a gallon jug of sherry. We had a few drinks, and a jolly time. I left the shop in a state of extreme contentment. I was at last given the opportunity to

illustrate a truly important book. And it was the story of a famous Italian, too — *The Letter of Amerigo Vespucci*—my first book for the Grabhorn Press.

TEISER: Will you describe your work on *The Letter of Amerigo Vespucci*?

ANGELO: The illustrations were completed in my flat on Macondray Lane, while I was still employed at the engraving plant. After reading the manuscript, some research was done at the San Francisco Public Library. It was a very exciting project.

The work entailed a hand-colored map on the title page, a pictorial initial for an introduction by Oscar Lewis, a 3/4 page colophon illustration.

The book was printed for members of The Book Club of California. The American Institute of Graphic Arts awarded the book a gold medal. I felt honored.

TEISER: Did you know the work of John Henry Nash, and Nash himself?

ANGELO: I met John Henry Nash only once. He said to me, "Oh. You're the artist who is working for those Grabhorns." He didn't seem very friendly to me at the time. Later I learned of the constant feuds between some printers in San Francisco.

TEISER: What arrangements did you make when you went to work for the Grabhorns? (Arrangements with them, that is.) Did Ed rather than Bob handle such arrangements?

ANGELO: No legal arrangements were made for my position at the press. A space near a window in a small room which was a combined office and entrance to the press was furnished with an old table and stool. This eventually became my studio after I gave up a lucrative position at my former job, as assistant to the art director there. Meantime the Grabhorns paid me twenty-five dollars a week as a retainer. It wasn't long before I was kept very busy with outside commissions. For besides printing books, the Grabhorns did considerable hand compositions in special types for advertising

agencies, and work for wealthy clients.

I was kept busier than ever illustrating ads for Wells Fargo, Chickering pianos, Ransohoffs, and other commercial and private enterprises.

It was shortly after I had illustrated *Salome* for the Grabhorns that I received a telephone call at the shop. Bob Grabhorn answered the phone. He said, "Valenti, it's Dashiell Hammett. He wants to talk to you." I answered the phone. The voice said, "Angelo, I just want to tell you that your illustrations for the Grabhorn *Salome* are superb. Could you come to see me? I would like to discuss the possibility of your doing some illustrations for the Samuels jewelry company.* I'm writing their ads."

The work I did with Dash Hammett had a special meaning for me. I had read some of his stories, but never dreamed of meeting the man. Through him many beautiful illustrations of jewelry came to life in newspaper ads, car cards and posters. The man was a genius. "I would suggest that all the ads appear dignified, and above all, extremely simple in line and color. And you're the man that can do them." My work for Hammett lasted a year, during which there were many meetings, and visits to his apartment where afternoons were spent discussing the fine arts and writing. He was working on a novel, *The Maltese Falcon*, at the time. And there were days when he offered me more gin than I could endure. It was because of him that my desire to write began. He was at times appalled by some of the stories I told him of my various experiences. "You should write all that down," he would say. "You're a good story teller."

I did not realize it then, that someday I too would become a writer. We met from time to time long after in New York and Westchester where I lived.

In the spring of 1928 my wife and I decided to purchase the studio that belonged to the famous water-color artist, Geneve Sargeant. The property was in Sausalito overlooking the bay. The studio was a one-story redwood dwelling with a large skylight and a fireplace. The property adjoined that of Harry Dixon,

*Albert S. Samuels Company.

the well-known artist-craftsman in metalwork. He had a shop on Tillman Place in San Francisco and commuted daily. My wife worked there executing color enameled copper plates and ashtrays, which was Dixon's specialty.

Nineteen hundred and twenty-seven had been a lucrative year. The work I did for advertising agencies kept me working overtime at home during the evenings. It was a period in my life when I was truly happy.

It wasn't long before additions were added to the studio. This work was accomplished mostly during the weekends. My father-in-law, who was connected with a building and construction business, was able to purchase materials for me at a reduced rate. The staff at the Grabhorn Press often crossed the bay to help with the building. Bob Grabhorn, Jack Gannon and other friends were of great help. And during the construction many gallons of wine, dishes of spaghetti and fried chicken were consumed with joy.

The Book of Job was printed after I had completed the *Salome*. This was a super-folio book, conceived from a large decoration of Job in color that was created as a painting. As it turned out, it is a magnificent job of bookmaking. A copy rests in the British Museum.

Nineteen hundred and twenty-eight had been a productive year for me as an illustrator of books. Beside the work involved in the illustrations and illuminations for *The Voiage and Travaile of Sir John Maundevile*, and the voyage of Sir Francis Drake*, I received commissions from New York publishers.

I think such Grabhorn Books as *The Letter of Amerigo Vespucci*, *The Book of Job*, and *The Golden Touch*, that were selected by the juries of The American Institute of Graphic Arts as best books of the year, helped to make my name known to some of the more important publishers on the East Coast.

My first commission was from Dodd, Mead & Co. of New York, which called for ten full-page illustrations in color for *South Wind*, by Norman Douglas; it was to be included in their new Ebony Library

**Francis Drake and Other Early Explorers Along the Pacific Coast.*



he Angelo home in Sausalito, 1927; Valenti and Maxine seated on steps.

Series. Because the story was about an intellectual, sophisticated group of English people then living in Capri, an island off the coast of Naples, and because of my being of Italian birth, I was chosen to illustrate it. The book became a best seller.

It was some twenty years later when I learned that my illustrations for that book had been rejected by the editors as being too modern in style. Some time later Dean Cornwall, a famous illustrator and muralist, was asked to give an opinion on my work as an illustrator of books. He informed the editors: "Valenti Angelo, the young Italian illustrator working with the Grabhorns on the West Coast, is a comer. I have seen some of his work on exhibition at the American Institute of Graphic Arts. His contribution to the art of the book will be long remembered."

It was on his recommendation that my illustrations for *South Wind* were finally published in 1928.

A commission to illustrate *A Sentimental Journey* by Laurence Sterne, 1929, followed the success of *South Wind*.

Other books followed. An interesting story, *Zadig*, by Voltaire was illustrated with twenty-four chapter head decorations, title page and binding design, printed in a sanguine color, and selected as one of the fifty best books of the year. It was published by Remington and Hooper, 1929, New York. Printed by Richard Ellis, at his Georgian Press, Connecticut.

Stephen Vincent Benet's *The Barefoot Saint*, a small book, was another book I enjoyed illustrating, also one of the fifty best books of 1929. It was published by Doubleday, Doran Co., Garden City, New York. The illustrations for these books were executed during my work on the *Leaves of Grass* and other Grabhorn books.

The Grabhorns, Their Associates, and Their Books

ANGELO: There were frequent visits to the press by well-known San Franciscans. Such a one was Albert Bender, who was an insurance broker and patron of the arts. He purchased every book printed by the press and donated them to libraries; The Bender Room at Mills College and the Bender Collection at Stanford University are two examples of the man's contributions to literary culture. He also helped several artists, such as Bufano, and others in the graphic arts. Two of my own early ceramic pieces of sculpture are also at Mills College. Albert always had a way of acquiring works of art free. "For a good cause, you know," he would say. Occasionally I would meet him on the street. We talked. Then suddenly, presto! He would pull a bright red necktie out of one of his many pockets. "For you, Valenti!" Then out of another, a small piece of jade. "For your dear wife, give it to her, Valenti."

And before I had time to thank him, Albert was on his way. A truly lovable character. His many donations to public institutions are monuments to his generosity. I recall a day when he invited me to his office in the old Mills Building on Montgomery Street. It was a very small room. There were no pictures on the walls and only one window, that faced a light well. A huge rolltop desk with a faded, framed diploma hanging over it, plus two ordinary chairs.

I was asked to sit down while he went through his mail.

"All checks, Valenti," he said. He put the checks back in their envelopes, then lifting the rolltop just a little, crammed the envelopes into what appeared to me an already overstuffed desk. I was somewhat puzzled by his way of doing business.

Albert said, "One of these days, Valenti, I'll have to clean out that desk." Then, very confidently, lowering his voice, he added, "There's almost twenty thousand dollars in checks in that desk." He winked at me. "Don't tell anyone, Valenti."

"I won't tell a soul, Albert." I thought, "Sometimes Albert has a very unusual sense of humor."

His studio and living quarters on Post Street was a museum of art objects—Chinese porcelains, both ancient and modern, scrolls, drawings and paintings by Anne Bremer, to whom some collections were dedicated. I remember seeing few books there. Most books he acquired were added to the ever-growing collections in libraries to which he contributed both money and objects of art.

The very first piece of printing I ever executed was for Bender, *The Twenty-Third Psalm*. It was a broadside, designed, printed, and illustrated with a woodcut. It was printed on a handpress on Pine Street at the Grabhorn Press, in an edition of twenty-five copies. (Note: My bibliography states twelve copies, which is wrong.)

Another contributor to the Grabhorn Press was Herbert Lionel Rothchild. He was a well-known corporation lawyer, and collector of fine books. *Two Unpublished Manuscripts*, written by Algernon Charles Swinburne, was the first book the press printed for him. It contains a portrait and hand-illuminated initials—and is considered by many to be one of the most beautiful books from the press. Also commissioned by him were special editions of both *Robyn Hode* and the *Fables of Esope*. His final book was *A Survey of Modern Bookmaking*, with reproductions from the work of famous presses. I was also commissioned to do a ceramic portrait of his child.

Oscar Lewis, who was then the secretary of The Book Club of California, worked at the press part-time as bookkeeper. He was one of the most amiable and helpful persons I had ever met. His office at the press was an abandoned washroom. There was still a bathtub there, buried beneath stacks of handmade paper and letter files. Besides answering mail, he was also asked from time to time to edit copy and write prospectuses and forewords for books. Ed Grabhorn seldom answered letters. The only mail he considered worthwhile was that which contained checks.

It was during this period that Oscar and Bob Grabhorn established the Westgate Press and published first-edition essays and short stories by American living authors. I recall meeting Sherwood Anderson at the press. His *American Grass Roots* was being published by Gelber-Lilienthal book dealers. He came to the press and (as I recall) there was considerable conversation concerning the disappearance of small country printers in the rural sections of America. I also learned at the time that Anderson was publishing a newspaper in Marion, Virginia. I did not realize at the time that Anderson was to play an important part in my life as a painter and sculptor.*

I often abandoned my drawing board to watch Ed compose a title page or a text page on the stone. He often smoked a pipe during this operation. Since he was always open to suggestions, I enjoyed standing by the stone and thereby hoped to learn more about the mysteries of typography.

When he had finally exhausted all possible changes, he would pull a proof and study it while his pipe stem drooled spittle, then lay the proof aside, relight his pipe and change the spacing of a line of type, and pull another proof. To me it seemed an endless, agonizing process. Different type faces were substituted.

In my mind I could envision the composition distinctly, and wondered if Ed could do the same. During these sessions, opinions were asked. It was then the shop turned into a nightmare of pros and cons.

And there were times when a final proof was accepted, the type locked into the chase, and then by some unknown deviltry pied on its way to be locked into the press.

It was then Ed would stare down at the scattered type, shake his head, relight his pipe, go to the clothes rack, put on his hat and coat, and disappear from the shop for hours. No one said a word. After a while Gregg or Jack would sweep up the type, reset it according to the final proof, and leave it on the stone.

*See also p. 106.

Shortly before quitting time Ed returned with a book under his arm as though nothing had happened.

"Hey! Look what I found at Holmes book store. It's in mint condition, too. Frank Norris' *McTeague*. And for only twenty-five cents."

It was during this period at the press that Bob Grabhorn showed me a copy of the celebrated Aldine *Hypnertomachia Poliphili*, of 1499, printed by Aldus Manutius of Venice. It was a richly decorated book, filled with outline drawings of architectural motifs and details, vases, arches, processions of draped figures, both male and female, children and animals, fruit and flowers, and various other designs, all printed from woodcuts.

It has been said that most of the Italian illustrators were influenced by the classical art employed by cabinet makers and potters whose designs appeared on Maiolica dishes and vases that are among the loveliest and most charming of the Italian Renaissance industrial art. It has been declared by many book lovers to be the most beautiful of all illustrated books.

I think this book, and many others I had been privileged to see during my childhood in Tuscany, had an enduring influence on my work as an illustrator of fine books.

It was Robert Grabhorn who started me on the path of book collecting. He received those large illustrated catalogs from Maggs book store in London every three or four months, filled with reproductions of the work from the world's famous presses. I began to collect books illustrated by Eric Gill, who was at that time my favorite illustrator, books from the Nonesuch Press, and some William Morris books printed at the Kelmscott Press. I also collected books by the famous German Bremer Press, principally the Gordon Craig *Hamlet*. Ashendene Press and books from the Doves Press were included in my ever-growing library. I also had at the time, circa 1932, a complete collection of the work of the Grabhorn Press, and several handwritten and hand-illuminated Italian and French *Books of Hours*, little gems, work from the hands of fourteenth-century masters of illumination and calligraphy.

I continued to work at my studio on Hotaling Place, where I painted and sculpted.* My furious and anguished battle to become a painter and sculptor had begun early in Antioch and San Francisco. How furiously I went at the work. One day a piece of modeling clay that was to represent the beautiful body of a woman in some unusual pose would change shape endlessly, until with uncontrollable anger it would suddenly be crunched back to a meaningless lump of clay.

It was no doubt becoming more obvious to me as time went on that painting, too, as a means of expression left me so completely dissatisfied. It became a struggle on some days to continue working in this manner. My work took on a different form every day. It was a struggle to attempt to complete the thing I so deeply loved. I wanted desperately to bring my work to life. But is a painting or a work of art ever fully completed?

Each painting or piece of sculpture becomes a piece of your life in a small unreal world with its character and style, experiences and all incredible happenings. You begin to create and to love the process of creation until a new vision begins to take form and becomes then a reality. You wish it would never end. Almost like a dream it vanishes and you find yourself back in the real world—tired, uneasy. And another part of you has vanished.

It was Sadakichi Hartmann who once said to me, "Your art being commercial is a sellout of your soul. You've got a great native talent. But your paintings are like pretty colored picture postcards. Man—you could do better. Wake up. Think of your ancestors—Leonardo da Vinci. His Mona Lisa. Sandro Botticelli, the Birth of Venus, and Michaelangelo, the Sistine Chapel."

From this dynamic, eccentric fellow I learned that it is not the surface in painting that matters, but the depth of one's innermost feelings that "creates" life upon it.

* See p. 106.

It was during the printing of a book written by Dr. John W. Robertson, *Francis Drake and Other Early Explorers Along the Pacific Coast*, that I bought Ed Grabhorn's Stutz Bearcat. He had married the doctor's daughter, Margery, who at the time owned two cars. Ed sold the car to me for three hundred dollars, which I paid off by doing work for the press. Ed taught me to drive.

I will never forget that driving lesson. The car was parked in the front of the building that housed the shop on Powell Street. I was very nervous about the transaction. I had driven my uncle's Model T Ford only once and ran it into a ditch.

Ed said, "All right, Val. Get in the car. I'll show you how this thing works. It's easy, once you get the hang of it." He demonstrated how to start, stop, and how to shift gears. "And always drive on the right side of the street. Understand?"

"All right, Ed," I said, all eyes on his hands.

And before I could wink an eye he had the Stutz into gear and racing at top speed up the Powell Street hill, at what I thought was at least one hundred miles an hour. I held on to my hat as he suddenly turned up California Street, almost running into a cable car.

Up California to Jones, where he stopped the car. He then repeated the driving instructions and got out of the car. "All right, Val, it's all yours now." We exchanged seats.

I sat behind the wheel, put the car into gear and drove along Jones Street to Green Street. There I stopped the car and looked down at the steepest street in San Francisco and shuddered at the thought of driving the car further.

"Go ahead, Val!" Ed said. "Remember what I told you. This car will go up or down any steep hill in the city. If it won't go up a very, very steep hill, well, just turn the car around and back it up."

I thought that was a good thing to know. However, after considerable shifting and grinding of gears, I got the car into low gear. After I had safely reached the bottom of the hill, Ed said, "Atta boy. Say, you're a pretty good driver, Val."

He didn't know it, but I had held my breath, trembling, all the way down the hill.

Ed got out of the car. "Well, be careful. I'll see you at the shop. I've got to go and see Margery." That concluded my driving lesson. For the rest of the afternoon I drove around North Beach, quite content with my new possession. Finally, I drove it onto the Sausalito ferry and parked it in front of my property in Sausalito.

After a year of constant effort, the additions to the house were completed. A small, chapel-like library with sunken windows and beamed ceiling was added. Also annexed was a two-storied structure, to include a dining room with a stairway leading to the second floor bedrooms and bath. Still another structure was added a year later with an outdoor balcony and an expansive view of the bay and the garden. It was nearing the end of 1928 when the entire ensemble was completed. After that, brick terraces were laid, and a circular fountain was constructed with stone and cement. My work as architect, builder, stone mason and decorator ended in 1929 during the stock market crash.

And how well I remember that day, the day of infinite despair. I particularly recall Dr. John Robertson's face when he entered the shop on Powell Street. It was the face of a frightened man. I was nearing the end of my work illuminating the travels of Maundevile.

He was a tall, stout man and he was breathing heavily. He sat down and began to talk.

He said, "Valenti, I've just come from my stock broker." There was a pause. "I've lost a million dollars!" He wiped his brow. His hand shook so badly that I thought he would have a stroke.

I said, "Gee, I'm sorry you lost all that money, Dr. Robertson. At least you can always say you had that much."

He looked at me and his eyes were blurred. Finally he stood up and walked into the press room. I can still hear his plaintive voice as he spoke to Ed Grabhorn, telling him all about his great misfortune.

That was the year my daughter Valdine was born. There was little work to be found after the market crash. I continued to commute to San Francisco, where I worked part-time at the Grabhorn Press and in my studio on Hotaling Place. There were exhibitions of my work as painter-sculptor. Albert Bender, Herbert Rothchild and others bought some of my work. Soon commissions that had kept me occupied-dwindled, as did my savings account.

During the days that followed, a great change in my life took place. The future seemed very uncertain, indeed. Everywhere the jobless increased. The payments on my house were almost completed when my wife and I decided to sell it and return to San Francisco. There followed many pros and cons in the course of making that decision. So much love and care had, over the past three years, gone into the building of what many called, "your creation— one of architectural delight and beauty." I had always wanted to create a house similar to those I had seen in Tuscany. And that was exactly what the house at 39 Prospect Avenue in Sausalito turned out to be. After considerable deliberation we agreed to sell it, including some very fine Italian antique furniture and Persian rugs.

We moved to Russian Hill and lived in an apartment at Broadway and Jones. Then later, through our friends Ruth and John Argens, we found an apartment with a garden, which was the property of the Atkins sisters, who were related to that famous establishment known as Vickery, Atkins & Torrey, interior decorators.

It was at the Grabhorn Press that I met the famous author, Sherwood Anderson, with whom I later became acquainted. I felt honored indeed to meet him. It was Leon Gelber, a bookseller, who was a collector of work by American authors, who introduced me to the man whose work I had read and admired. *Winesburg, Ohio*, his first book dealing with small town people in the mid-western states, was and still is one of my favorite books.

I was overwhelmed by the way he welcomed me that afternoon. During our conversation concerning art in America, while he examined some of my most recent work, he instilled in me feelings of inspiration

and enthusiasm and a sense of confidence.

I was at the time involved in a theme concerning the working man as an integral, important part of the American industrial revolution. People occupied in the fields and factories. And more flattering was the fine introduction he had taken the time to write for a catalog of my paintings and life-size drawings that were exhibited at a San Francisco gallery.

What an extraordinary man and how intelligent he was. He was extremely sensitive to painters and writers, and enthusiastically encouraged them to continue in their efforts. He was a friend indeed. He visited my apartment on Leavenworth Street with his new wife, Eleanore. I had just finished a portrait of my daughter modeled in plaster. He was so impressed by my work as sculptor that he commissioned me to make a portrait of Eleanore, which was reproduced in ceramic terra cotta.

On December 27, 1932, I received a letter from Sherwood Anderson. It was one of his exuberant declarations concerning my work as a painter. He had bought a small painting—a portrait of a young girl feeding a canary, which was titled *Girl with Canary*. He wrote:

"Dear Angelo, The little naive lady—so beautifully balanced between mystery and fact, feeds her bird by the window. She plucks trees out of the hills and feeds them to the yellow canary. This must be the wop in you, that can be so charmingly far and so warmly near—all in one moment.

I would pretty much have given an arm to have seen the show and all the coloring splashed about.

10,000,000 thanks—Sherwood Anderson"

It was the year 1932. The country had already experienced three years of a Depression that was making paupers of most of the American population. Everywhere on the outskirts of California towns, there were to be found camps of displaced migrant people living in tents and makeshift wooden shacks. It was pitiful to see half-starved children dressed in tattered clothes.

The money I had saved from the sale of my house was melting away. Every day was spent in my studio, painting pictures I knew no one cared to buy. Local painters and sculptors were employed by W.P.A. projects, earning wages that barely kept them alive. God Bless America.

It was Robert Gump who suggested that I have a one-man show at the Gumps' galleries. During a period of six months I had completed some thirty paintings, depicting both classical and industrial subject matter. I was at the time experimenting with a chiaroscuro style of painting much in the manner used by Italian painters during the Renaissance but in very limited colors, such as burnt sienna, lapis blue, black and emerald green. My use of the limited colors produced a very illuminating, jewel-like quality by which I became known as "Angelo, the Renaissance Man."

Reviews were magnanimous and diverse. Some art critics hailed me as a new talent and some tried to expose to the public the many influences depicted in the style of my work as a painter. Of the thirty paintings exhibited, only four were sold. The remainder were shipped to a New York gallery.

I think it was an article written by Thomas Craven, a well-known New York art critic, that spurred me to leave San Francisco and to move to that great metropolis. He, after having seen an exhibition of my work at the Gumps' galleries, suggested the paintings be shipped to the Ferragil Galleries in New York.

TEISER: Would you describe your work on some other Grabhorn books that interested you particularly? (Especially *Leaves of Grass*, if it did involve particularly interesting work for you—which I believe it did.)

ANGELO: There were *The Scarlet Letter*, *Red Badge of Courage* and a new edition of the *Autobiography of Benvenuto Cellini*, of which I still possess the original decoration.

The Travaile of Sir John Maundevile is perhaps one of the Grabhorns' finest achievements. It was to be published and distributed by the press, until Bennett Cerf of Random House saw it in the process of my drawing the initials for its pages. He bought the entire edition for resale by his firm. He also ordered a new

edition of the *Leaves of Grass*.

With commissions for all of these books, the Grabhorns decided to move to larger quarters. A place was found next door to an old Chinese joss house, a temple on Pine Street. I immediately carved a new sign on wood, depicting a dolphin entwined around a horn. The new address was 510 Pine Street. My days spent there were some of the happiest in my life. It was there that the *Leaves of Grass*, the *Robyn Hode*, the *Fables of Esope*, *The Scarlet Letter*, and many other books to which I contributed my art, came to life.

The work on the *Leaves of Grass* alone was unbelievable. For nine long months I was given pages set in different kinds of type. For each page set I endeavored to draw a decoration that would be in harmony with the type, after which everyone in the shop was asked his opinion. There were days when I thought I was employed in a lunatic asylum—for all of the pros and cons that followed each trial page.

I had imagined, after spending hours in reading the text, that poetry of this strength and scope should be decorated with strong, earthy symbols of life in nature, and of man as a part of it. It was early in the process of illustrating this masterwork of poetry that strong decorations cut on wood kept coming to mind. Finally, I designed and cut a few decorations on plank maple wood. Lo and behold, everyone agreed this idea was well worth considering. Up to this period in experimenting, most of the type used in the trials proved too weak to be in harmony with the strong woodcuts. So more pages of type were set, blacker and stronger in character. It proved too formal in appearance. It was not until a new face cut by Fredrick Goudy was found and proofs taken that I began to see a harmony between the art work and the type.

Nine long months of growing pains came to an end. I must mention also that I was not the only illustrator employed on the project. There were other artists. One in particular that comes to mind was Maynard Dixon, well known for his painting of the American Southwest. He was in constant contact with the Grabhorns. He was so eager to illustrate the Whitman that for the Grabhorns there were moments of embarrassment. "We've got an illustrator," they said.

I often frequented the old Art Center Gallery on Montgomery Street those days. Harriet Whedon was curator there. We became good friends. One day Maynard Dixon walked into the gallery and sat down beside me. After a few words concerning the pictures hung in the gallery, he turned to me and asked me if I would like to come upstairs to his studio. Maynard and I never had much in common. I guess I never drew well enough. I felt a little embarrassed by his sudden cordiality and followed him up the stairs to his studio. I sat down and he showed me some drawings in black and white. They were studies of the desert—cactus, horses, cowboys and Indians. I always liked his work and admired his bold style. Suddenly he asked me a question.

He said, "Valenti, if you were given a commission to illustrate Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*,"—there was a pause—"how would you go about doing it?"

Coming from an artist of his reputation, the question struck me as rather a strange one.

For a moment I was both speechless and embarrassed. It was not until my sometime Tuscan wit came to my rescue that I was able to look up into Maynard's face—and I am certain that my face was flushed red before I replied. "Mr. Dixon," I said, "I think that I would illustrate the poetry of Whitman with strong, simple, black and white woodcuts."

He smiled and said, "Yes—Ed showed them to me just the other day. Ed seems to be kind of stuck with your idea."

That day, after my meeting with Dixon, the word "stuck" kept echoing in my mind for a long time after.

TEISER: Did you often redo work at the Grabhorns' request? Did they often make suggestions as to how you should do your work?

ANGELO: The brothers seldom asked me to make changes in my conception of an illustration. They just kept quiet until I went through various changes of the subject, then decided which one was better suited for the book in progress. Their procedure on all projects always seemed to me an operation known as trial by error. There were times when I felt it was somewhat

exercised to excess, as was the mountain of work I did for the Whitman *Leaves of Grass*, after which the very first woodcuts I had made were used. To this day I'm still plagued by this process of experimentation, whenever I plan a book.

TEISER: Most people did not know until recently that Ed Grabhorn was the owner of the business and Bob only an employee. Were you aware of that?

ANGELO: I had no knowledge that Edwin Grabhorn was the sole owner of the business. I always took it for granted that since they were brothers, there must exist a partnership in the establishment. I was not aware of it until after Edwin's death that Robert was only an employee. I was rather shocked when finally I heard the news. Of the two brothers, Robert had always been a dear friend. It was from him that I learned more about the art of fine printing and book production. Ours became a long and lasting friendship. During all the time I knew Edwin, he remains a puzzle to me.

TEISER: Could you characterize each of the brothers and comment upon their relationship and how they worked together? What would you say were the major strengths of each of them?

ANGELO: Edwin was different from his brother Robert. He was less learned in literature, and in matters of design his approach was toward the commonplace, and was often influenced and derivative. He was an admirer of such men as Updike, Rogers, and other designers who worked during the turn of the century. He did not appreciate the moderns as did Robert Grabhorn. As I recall, it was Robert who made the final decisions on the work in progress.

TEISER: Could you comment upon Jane Grabhorn, her work, and her part in the press operations?

ANGELO: A young apprentice, William Bissell, was hired. He didn't last long. It was through him that Robert Grabhorn met his wife to be, Jane Bissell Grabhorn. She had graduated from a religious institution. I think it was a convent school. I do recall the day I first

rested my eyes on what appeared to be the nth degree of innocence. Such excellent manners and so shy a young person I had never met before. Of course with Robert Grabhorn it was love at first sight.

It was in the thirties during the Depression that Robert married Jane. I recall that she often came to the press at 510 Pine Street to visit him and there became acquainted with the type cases and to learn about printing. I did not think at the time that she would ever become a printer.

I do remember vividly the parties that Robert and Jane gave in their Russian Hill apartment. Oh, those wild parties—those terrible bathtub gin hangovers. And when my wife, who was innocent about this kind of life and was brought up strictly non-alcohol, took part, I was shocked. She even dressed in the fashions of the day.

"You can't wear that kind of dress. My God! You look like a chorus girl, a bobbed-haired flapper with rolled-up stockings."

It was all the effects of war on a strained society and economy, with jazz music for temporary relief, not to speak of the invasion into California by the Okies and the Arkies. What had happened to America? No one seemed to investigate the condition or really care.

It was a period of avant-garde movements, all of which reached San Francisco by way of New York and Chicago. I went to see a fantastic motion picture, a silent film filled with madness, crime and cruelties, titled *The Cabinet of Doctor Caligari*. This new film was in harmony with the new movements in the plastic arts, and pictorial exposes by such men as Dali, Max Ernst, Tanguy and others. The king of them all was of course the versatile genius, a Spaniard, Pablo Picasso, whose mind was to become a storehouse of tricks and surprises. He ended by declaring that "No matter how much you change the plastic image of an object, it will always remain the same."

And the motion picture industry, the golden age of silent movies, took a turn for the better, moving from the genius of Chaplin's *The Gold Rush*, *The Passion of Joan of Arc*, and actors like Harry Landon, Buster Keaton and Laurel and Hardy—to the talkies.

Today I still have tender and warm feelings for those lovable fools.

Since the Grabhorns, in order to remain in business, had begun to publish a series of books, which were called "Californiana," there was little work for me. The books were illustrated with repros of old cuts. I began to spend more time out of the shop. Soon I acquired a studio on Hotaling Place and began to paint and sculpt in earnest. It was a huge loft. Bob Howard, Raymond Puccinelli, Jacques Schnier, Ben Cunningham, each had space there. It was near Stackpole's studio.

TEISER: Could you comment upon the other people who worked at or with the Grabhorn Press while you were associated with it?

ANGELO: The first apprentice to come to the press was Helen Gentry. She was a friend of Porter Garnett and had studied printing under him at Carnegie Institute of Technology. She was a very small person, I remember, and was very good at setting type. In fact she was so fast that while she worked on setting copy for the *Book of Job*, she unknowingly repeated hand setting a page of the same text twice without being aware of the error. She was very frank about her knowledge of printing and often started heated arguments on the art of printing during which the name of the master printer, Porter Garnett, became sanctified. It wasn't long before she opened her own shop, where several little books were printed. One in particular which comes to mind was, *Puss in Boots*. Later she moved to New York where she became involved in publishing children's books.

One morning a young man appeared at the press dressed in blue jeans and a red shirt with a guitar slung over his shoulder. He told the Grabhorns he was a country printer from Oregon and needed a job. "I'm a good, fast compositor," he said. "I hitchhiked and need money."

Edwin told him he didn't need a compositor but he could start by washing the windows. John Ira Gannon performed such a splendid job of washing windows that he ended by becoming one of the

establishment's best composers. He also turned out to be a sort of jack-of-all-trades.

Gregg Anderson worked at the press in 1931. He drove up from Los Angeles, and for a while lived in the house of Hazel Dries, the bookbinder. Good printing was already an obsession with him, and remained with him as long as he lived. He had operated a private press with Roland Baughman in Los Angeles. He was a gentle person, with a mild manner and a slow, reserved smile. At the age of twenty-two he already knew more about the art of printing than most old pros. It was he who undertook to hand set the type for the Random House edition of Stephen Crane's *The Red Badge of Courage*, a mammoth undertaking. He left the Grabhorn Press a year later to work for the Meriden Gravure Co., of Meriden, Connecticut, as superintendent of the shop. Later he was drafted into the army, sent to France as a lieutenant and was killed during the invasion of Normandy.

The staff at the press at the time also included the pressman, Tom Hewitt, and a very old English compositor who was called "old man Adams." The bookbinder was William Wheeler. Oscar Lewis appeared at the press part-time as secretary.

I had a large drawing board beside a window that faced Pine Street where I did most of the work of illustrating, decorating and hand-initialing of many books that were printed.

TEISER: Your bibliography includes *Two Unpublished Manuscripts* by Swinburne, with hand-colored initials. When was hand coloring done rather than color added on the press at the Grabhorns?

ANGELO: Hand coloring was done on editions limited to five or ten copies, when it was not worthwhile running colors on the press.

TEISER: But the Swinburne book was printed in an edition of fifty copies.

ANGELO: The initials for the Swinburne book were printed. They were open spaced initials. I added color by hand after the initials were printed. The Swinburne book was an exception, fifty copies hand colored.

TEISER: Had you met Ansel Adams before you worked on *Taos Pueblo*?

ANGELO: It was during the printing of *Taos Pueblo* by the Grabhorns when I first met Ansel Adams. Later at a party celebrating the publication of the book I met Virginia. It was a most jubilant party, I recall, with Ansel improvising on the piano with an orange in each hand, between rounds of tasty cocktails and delicious goodies.

TEISER: How did it happen that the Grabhorn Press printed *El Triunfo de la Cruz* for you? Did you do any of the typesetting or press work?

ANGELO: The Grabhorns printed *El Triunfo de la Cruz* as a Christmas book for me. The type was hand set by me, being my second attempt at the case. It was printed by the Grabhorns and bound by William Wheeler, and was distributed to my friends Christmas 1930.

TEISER: *The Twenty-Third Psalm* is given in your bibliography as the first piece you set and printed. How did it come about?

ANGELO: Albert Bender wanted me to design a broadside. Something religious. I chose to do *The Twenty-Third Psalm* of David. It is throughout a one-man operation, from design, woodcut decoration, hand-set type and printed on a handpress, all by myself.

TEISER: Others have said that Bob Grabhorn was a good teacher of typesetting. Did he help you learn?

ANGELO: It was through Bob Grabhorn that I first learned all about printing and hand setting type.

TEISER: Did you continue printing here in San Francisco until you went to New York?

ANGFLO: I did little typographical printing while in San Francisco. Only some experimental work on the handpress at the shop of the Grabhorns.

TEISER: In 1932 the Windsor Press printed and published *Pierrot of the Minute* with your frontispiece. Will you give us your recollections of the Johnson brothers? Did the Grabhorns mind your doing work for other local printers?

ANGELO: The *Pierrot of the Minute* is the only book I illustrated for the Windsor Press. The Johnson brothers were very competent printers. Most of their work was of a commercial nature. The Grabhorns did not mind my doing work for them.

TEISER: What other Bay Area printers did you come to know in those years?

ANGELO: I was not acquainted with other Bay Area printers; I only heard about them through the Grabhorns.

TEISER: If you knew Col. C.E.S. Wood and Sara Bard Field, would you give us your recollections of them?

ANGELO: Col. C.E.S. Wood and Sara Bard Field were frequent visitors at the Grabhorn Press. The colonel was a very impressive individual, a sort of Walt Whitman type, very slow in speech, corpulent in physical appearance. He moved about slowly as if carrying a huge burden. On the contrary, Sara was rather timid, very gentle in conversation. I often got the impression that the difference in their stature was also a burden to Sara.

During their visits, whatever work was in progress came to a halt and everyone had a cup of tea, during which the colonel spoke of his collection of the work of the painter George Innes.

TEISER: Would you tell a little more about your years on Macondray Lane* and describe Giuseppe Cadenasso, your neighbor, and characterize briefly his paintings?

*See also pp.82-83.

ANGELO: It was after I was hired by the Commercial Art and Engraving Company that I gave up my studio at 1625 California Street and moved to Macondray Lane.

For a time I lived in a flat occupied by William Gaskin and Peter Fredricksen. They were both art students at Mark Hopkins Institute and studied color theories under Rudolph Schaeffer. It was there that I first met my wife, Maxine Grimm.

I had a few encounters with Giuseppe Cadenasso, the famous landscape artist. As I recall, he was the most energetic, ebullient person I had ever met. After his death I rented his studio. The widow Cadenasso took an interest in me and showed me many of his works. They always seemed low in key, moody and somber. They were mostly California landscapes. It wasn't long before I was seriously influenced by the man's work and began painting in a low key palette. Later I gave up the idea for a more colorful one.

The studio was an ideal one. It had a view of the bay and was sheltered by some elegant eucalyptus trees. Leo Cadenasso, the painter's son, was a constant visitor. There were times when he resented my living there. To him his father's studio had become a very important shrine. After six months of interrupted privacy, I moved to a studio in the Montgomery Block—known to artists as the Monkey Block. My friend John Stoll had a studio next to mine. It was there I met Matthew Barnes. I will never forget the strange odor that prevailed throughout that building. At times I felt as though I lived in a hay loft. There seemed to be a number of shady characters living in that place. It was during Prohibition and there were nights when one got little sleep.

New York and The Limited Editions Club

TEISER: What were the immediate circumstances of your move to New York?

ANGELO: Plans to move to New York had been completed. The money that I had saved from sales of paintings from an exhibition held at the Gumps' galleries was all that remained of my wealth. During the past six years I had collected many fine books. The library which I was very proud of was sold at a great loss. David Magee purchased the collection, for which I had paid a small fortune, for the sum of five hundred dollars. Some book dealers from whom I had purchased some of the higher priced items offered me less. They complained, "It's the Depression." To this day I dream of that collection of beautiful books.

But that was not the worst calamity during that period. A week before our departure for New York my five-year-old daughter Valdine became ill. What seemed only a cold developed into a double mastoid infection. She was rushed to Children's Hospital and was operated on immediately. A month of uncertain recovery followed, during which Maxine, my wife, developed a physical nervous condition that verged on insanity. I thought our lives had come to an end. I had experienced several trials and tribulations during my life and had survived them all. I often look back on them with renewed confidence. The ordeal lasted one agonizing month and, with the help of my friends and doctors, my daughter recovered and the afflictions that had tormented the mind of my wife passed. A new life now lay ahead of us.

On October 12th, 1933, I sat on a bench with my wife and daughter in the Ferry Building at the foot of Market Street. We waited to board the ferry that would take us to Point Richmond, and the terminal of the Overland Limited. In my coat pocket I had a letter from Franklin and Beatrice Wolf. They would meet us at Grand Central Terminal in New York. Our friends Dorothea and Leon Gelber, Bob Grabhorn and Jane and others had come to celebrate our departure. I remember that Leon had brought a bottle of champagne, and with my eyes on the clock we drank a toast to our future. And there were moments when I was suddenly struck by apprehensive thoughts, and how foolish I must be to leave San Francisco at a time when the Depression had made paupers of most of the U.S. population.

During a moment of merriment I made a statement that was to become a part of my philosophical nature: that since there was a chance of starvation if I remained in San Francisco, New York would at least be a far more interesting city in which to starve.

The journey across the country was uneventful. How different though, from the one I had made in 1905, in a battered old train and cattle car. During the journey we were surprised to find on the train Katherine Wood, daughter of Charles Erskine Scott Wood* and Sara Bard Field, and we enjoyed a visit all the way to the East Coast. She had enrolled in some eastern college.

I recall vividly the shanty towns along the Hudson River. In fact they had become conspicuous on the outskirts of most large American cities throughout the country.

Accompanied by our friends, we went on the New York Central, Harlem Division, commuter train to Bronxville, a charming little town in Westchester County where unknowingly I was to spend the next forty years of my life living and working.

TEISER: Would you tell whatever was significant about your exhibit at the Ferragil Galleries in New York? How many paintings did you show? Were many sold? Was there critical acclaim of your work? Did it become widely known then in New York?

ANGELO: What was significant about my exhibit in New York is that it made my name known in that city's art circles.

The exhibit was held in the well-known Ferragil Galleries on 57th Street, then the center of art galleries in New York City. The exhibit consisted of some twenty-five paintings in oil, and was scheduled to open after my arrival in New York. This gallery represented the work of such artists as Thomas Hart Benton, John Stuart Curry, Reginald Marsh and other American moderns, and it was there that I met several well-known painters and some art students. One in particular was Jackson Pollock, who was then a student of

*Step-daughter of C.E.S. Wood, daughter of Sara Bard Field.



Views of Valenti Angelo's studio in Bronxville, New York.



Benton. Later we had a joint exhibit at the same gallery. He was a very lively chap, I recall, and gave me the impression that he was determined to succeed.

Notices about the exhibit and articles appeared in newspapers and art magazines of the times. I think this made my name known to the public in and around New York City. The catalogue also contained critical essays from art critics such as Thomas Craven, Merle Armitage, Sherwood Anderson and others.

Some paintings were sold, I recall. Others were shipped to various exhibits such as the Allied Arts, Pennsylvania Academy of Art, the National Academy and others.

TEISER: Did you have a painting on the cover of a national magazine at about that same time?

ANGELO: One of my favorite paintings, "The Circus Pony," was produced in full color on the front cover of the swanky magazine, *Town and Country*. That painting was sold later to Harry Daniels, the son of a wealthy industrialist, for whom I executed a statue of Saint Francis in western granite, life size. It now rests on their estate in Bristol, Virginia. The figure, raised on a four-foot square pedestal bearing a legend and bas-relief of birds and beasts, has become well known throughout that region.

Some reproductions of my work also appeared in the *Art Digest* magazine, and other art periodicals during the thirties.

TEISER: How did you become acquainted with the Limited Editions Club? How did George Macy's organization operate from the point of view of a person working for it?

ANGELO: How I became acquainted with the Limited Editions Club could be classified as somewhat of a miracle, and a salvation for me and my work as designer and illustrator of books.

There had been some unfavorable gossip among San Francisco printers and book dealers toward the Limited Editions Club, and especially its director, George Macy, which to me still remains a mystery. I

knew that the Grabhorns, who were commissioned to print a book for that firm, had some problems with the club's director, and I was warned to be careful with whom I dealt if ever I became involved in a commission to illustrate a book for him. For this reason (and it was at the time a foolish one on my part) I did not visit the director of the Limited Editions Club.

Publishing in New York was, during the Depression, at a low ebb. I took my samples to Knopf; Doubleday, Doran; Harper's; and many others, and soon discovered that there was little work to be found for an illustrator, especially one such as myself whose specialty was fine books in limited editions. Everyone reminded me of the Depression. Some made promises: "Sorry Mr. Angelo, yes Mr. Angelo. We know. You are the greatest. Would you care to do a book jacket for us? We can't pay you very much. Only twenty dollars." Day after day, week after week, I carried my heavy portfolio of examples of fine printing. Examples from the *Leaves of Grass*, *The Red Badge of Courage*, the travels of John Maundevile, and many other examples of work I had executed for the Grabhorn Press.

"Oh, they're wonderful. But we really couldn't afford that kind of work." There were moments during my search that I wished that I had remained in San Francisco. I had not foreseen the fact that publishing in New York was at such a low ebb. However (and it must be the Tuscan in me) I still had hopes of a commission. Then suddenly my luck changed.

I had met Bennett Cerf, who was then president of Random House, Inc., in San Francisco during the printing of *Leaves of Grass* and the Maundevile, two of the four books he had commissioned the Grabhorns to print, and to be sold by his firm. He had just formed the Modern Library, reprints of classics and the work of modern authors.

He gave me a hearty welcome, and immediately put me to work designing book jackets and decorations whenever needed. From that day on I stopped showing my portfolio of examples. For three months I worked on book jackets. It was an experience indeed, for I had never designed book jackets before, and being a new field, it became a fascinating occupation

because of the great variety of designs entailed in their production. And, of course, soon I found myself employed by other publishers. I was so embroiled in book jackets that I began to see them in my sleep, which reminds me of an incident concerning a joke that Marcel Duchamp played on the famous publisher, Alfred Knopf.

Marcel Duchamp had just arrived from Paris and was in search of work. He went to see Knopf, who commissioned Marcel to do a jacket. Two weeks later Marcel delivered personally a drawing, his idea (a tongue-in-cheek one I'm sure) in black and white, of a hotel waiter's jacket on a coat hanger. Of course Knopf paid him for it, but it was never used. It was returned to Marcel, who in turn gave it to Rudi Blesh, a friend of mine and an authority on modern art. It's probably worth a small fortune on today's French art market.

Which reminds me that I once owned an original oil painting by Jackson Pollock that I bought for fifteen dollars from his first show at the Ferragil Galleries in 1933. It represented a rural scene executed much in the manner of Thomas Hart Benton, [painted] during his period of study with the well-known midwestern painter. The painting was lost during the moving from one apartment to another. The movers claimed they had no record of it.

It was a day in December 1933 when I decided to call on George Macy, director of the Limited Editions Club. It had snowed the day before, and Fifth Avenue was being cleared of heavy drifts of snow as I struggled with my portfolio of examples to the club's headquarters.

As I sat waiting in the small reception room, I tried to envision what Mr. George Macy might look like. I had never seen a picture of him, but from what I had heard about him I imagined he would be a tall, stout, clean-cut businessman.

A door opened. I was wrong. The man was just the opposite of what I had envisioned him to be. He was medium height, and the most prominent feature was the shape of his head. It was a large head tapering pear-shaped to his chin. His blond hair was a

complement to his sharp blue eyes. A faint smile played around the edges of his lips as he stood looking at me. I stood up and extended my hand. His little fat sausage-like fingers were moist. Before I could utter one word, he said: "So! You're the great Valenti Angelo. I know that you've been in New York for some time." He seemed a little peeved: "Why didn't you come to see me first?"

His secretary coughed and glanced quickly in my direction. She smiled. And the meaning I read on her face seemed to imply, "Don't be afraid of the big, bad wolf, little man."

"Well, Mr. Macy," I replied, "the truth of the matter is—I've been very busy."

"Doing what?" he asked.

"Designing book jackets, mostly for Random House. And, and—"

"Jackets?" He smiled. It was a faint smile and his eyes twinkled. "I'm sure a man of your reputation deserves more than that." He placed a hand on my shoulder in a fatherly manner. "Come into my office. There are some things I want to discuss with you." And as he directed me toward his office he kept repeating the word *jackets* over and over again.

I had never met a more inquisitive person. He wanted to know all about my past life—and especially my connection with the brothers Grabhorn, for whom I had worked for seven years. At times he conveyed little respect for the brothers and the way they had mutilated the illustrations for the club's book, *Robinson Crusoe*, illustrated by Edward Wilson.*

I was going to tell him that I'd had a hand in cutting woodcuts for the colored illustrations in that book, but thought better of it.

The morning passed swiftly. It was one o'clock when he asked me to go to lunch with him, where we could talk further of the plans he had in mind for my future as an illustrator for the club. There were some happy moments racing through my mind on that day—moments so foreign to those I had ever

* See pp. 119.

experienced before that I felt as though a new world had opened up for me, one that would become richer, more fascinating and exciting as time went on.

The St. Regis Hotel is still one of the most respected hotels in the city of New York. Everyone seemed to know George Macy. On that day during lunch I met celebrities I had heard of. Clifton Fadiman, Franklin P. Adams, [Alexander] Woollcott, a host of others were there. All seemed to know each other, for they were all men of letters. In time I was privileged to know most of them.

After a lunch that only millionaires could afford, I was escorted back to his [Macy's] office.

It seemed all too good to be true. One commission followed another. He examined examples, pages of new editions of *The Song of Songs which is Solomon's*, *The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam*, *Salome*, and some drawings for a proposed Richard Burton's *The Book of the Thousand Nights and a Night*—for which he asked me to execute 1001 decorative illustrations. That commission alone would have been ample reward, but before proceeding with it he wanted me to design and decorate what he called a deluxe gift edition of *The Song of Songs which is Solomon's*, which was embellished with two-color full page borders surrounding text pages, with eight initials hand illuminated in 23 carat gold. The first special edition of five thousand copies contained a special illustration signed by the artist and had been published by the firm's Heritage Press in 1934, three months after my arrival in New York.

As he looked through my portfolio, he said, "Valenti, you are a very lucky man. This portfolio contains a veritable gold mine."

That visit was to stay with me for a long time to come. Before I left his office I was given a substantial advance payment for the work I was to do on my first three illustrated book commissions for the Limited Editions Club of New York.

On my way home on the train I silently wept with a joy I had never experienced before. A commuter sitting beside me finally asked me if I was all right.

I replied, "Sorry, I'm just fine," and wiped away my tears.

"Then why are you crying?" he asked.

"I—I'm so...so happy," I replied. He gave me a quick side glance, then continued reading his paper. In all probability he thought I was some kind of a nut.

In the Angelo house that night there was great rejoicing. Our friends and neighbors, Beatrice and Franklin Wolf, who lived across the hall in the same apartment building, supplied the bootleg gin, and the Angelo family was on the way to a new life and happiness.

On the following day I was to meet with Bruce Rogers and Frederic Warde, two of the best known book designers of their time, to discuss the composition and the decorations I was to execute for *The Thousand Nights and a Night*. The six-volume edition was to be printed for the club by the printing house of William Edwin Rudge, the finest printing establishment of its kind.

For me it was the beginning of a relationship with Bruce Rogers, one that would last for a long while.

It wasn't long before my name became known to craftsmen and printers in and around New York City, and my drawing board was kept very busy.

TEISER: You mentioned that Macy was critical of the illustrations in the Grabhorn *Robinson Crusoe*. What was the problem?

ANGELO: A complete set of zinc plates was provided by the Limited Editions Club for printing the illustrations for *Robinson Crusoe*. They were for three colors. The Grabhorns tried to use them. They soon discovered that a transparent watercolor wash effect, which the original illustrations possessed, could not be achieved through printing from metal plates. I was therefore asked to cut linoleum blocks for each color. The results were very effective and the printers completed the reproduction of the illustrations in this manner.

I do not think that Edward Wilson, the illustrator of the book, was happy with the final results, however. I met him in New York on occasions, and he complained bitterly, not only how the Grabhorns had reproduced his illustrations but how badly they had taken the liberty to change his original design for the book's title page. Despite all the fuss made over the reproductions, the *Robinson Crusoe* is among one of the fine books printed by the Grabhorn Press.

TEISER: What of your work for the Limited Editions Club do you feel was most significant?

ANGELO: I think the six-volume set of the *Thousand Nights and a Night* is perhaps one of the best editions ever published in America.

The Song of Roland is another title I enjoyed illustrating. I was fortunate in having a fine printer, Edmund Thompson of Connecticut, where we more or less worked together on the book. The handmade paper, the hand-set type, fine press work, and craftsmanship in binding, plus the hand-colored decorations, surely make the volume one of the most desired by collectors of fine bookmaking.

In a different category the smaller gems—like *The Rubaiyat* and *The Kasidah* are also in the fine book category.

TEISER: Were you paid by the book? Did you submit work for approval when you began illustrating a book, or did you go ahead on your own?

ANGELO: When I was commissioned to design and decorate a book, I was paid for each book, and if hand work was required I would be paid extra. I seldom submitted illustrations for approval. I was the illustrator.

Creating Book Illustrations and Paintings

TEISER: Where did you do your work in the years you were in New York?

ANGELO: From the years 1934 to 1942 all of my work was done in a four-room apartment in Bronxville, New York.

TEISER: Did you continue doing work occasionally for the Grabhorns and others in California?

ANGELO: The only work that was done for the Grabhorns after I left San Francisco was for a book published by David Magee. It was a monograph of an Italian gradual that was printed by the Grabhorns and contains fourteen large three-color initials done in calligraphic style with a wooden reed pen. The text was written by H. Schulz.* The work was done during a long visit to San Francisco in 1941 with my wife and children.

TEISER: Did you continue painting and selling your paintings in New York?

ANGELO: In 1942 I bought a house on a hill in Bronxville. It had a large room on the second floor which I used as a studio. Later a skylight was cut into the ceiling facing north. Between commissions to illustrate books, I painted pictures and continued to do sculpture. It was in this studio, after a visit to San Francisco, that my fourth book for children, was written and published by the Viking Press of New York, in 1942, the *Hill of Little Miracles*.

TEISER: Can you give the names of some of the people and institutions that have shown your paintings?

ANGELO: See the attached list.**

*H.C. Schulz, *A Monograph on the Italian Choir Book*.

**Appendix Three.

TEISER: Did you return to Italy during those years?

ANGELO: During my stay on the East Coast no trips to Italy were made because of the war in Europe.

TEISER: Would you give us your recollections of Bruce Rogers, Frederic Warde, and Edmund Thompson?

ANGELO: Of the well-known printers and designers on the East Coast, Bruce Rogers deserves to be considered the dean of them all. He was of fair complexion, with blond hair slightly tinged with white at the temples. His blue eyes, as he conversed, seemed always in search for something in the distance. He was a good listener. In appearance, his tweed clothes conveyed the character of an upper-class English gentleman. Perhaps it was the result of his association with such well-known printers and designers as Emery Walker and Francis Meynell of the famous Nonesuch Press in England. His manner of speech seemed faultless. He had one weakness that I'm tempted to mention. I met him on occasion at banquets, given in his honor. Somehow, during a speech, usually delivered by a well-known celebrity, Bruce always managed to fall asleep.

And he was somewhat of a wit, too. I recall the day I delivered my 1001 illustrations to Edwin Rudge, who was printing the Arabian Nights tales. Bruce was there. He looked them over carefully, after which he turned to me and smiled. "I see you're doing illustrations by the yard now," he said. I replied, "No, no, Mr. Rogers—by the mile."

The illustrations had been drawn on large sheets of drawing paper which contained a variety of sizes, to correspond with the text.

Frederic Warde, a graduate of Princeton University, on the other hand, was a very serious person. He had just finished designing a new type face, Arrighi in caps and italic, a revival of an early Italian type. Warde's wife Beatrice was a brilliant woman, an authority on printing. She later became known as Paul Beaujon, an iconoclastic critic of modern printing and printers in general. She was a great supporter of the work of Eric Gill, the man and his radical ideology.

Warde died in 1938.

I met Edmund Thompson of Hawthorne House in Windham, Connecticut, in 1935, at a meeting of The Columbiad Club of Connecticut, of which I had been made a member through the suggestion of Carl Rollins, then director of Yale University Press.

Thompson was a great admirer of both Bruce Rogers and Daniel Updike, and much of his work reflected the sharp, clean, simple style of early Connecticut printers. He was a meticulous compositor, often shaving letters for proper fitting and spacing. His press work was always neat and clean-cut. And he seldom used cheap grades of paper. I would say he was a true disciple of the Connecticut Yankee printers' school.

In 1935, *Cherry Ripe*, by A.E. Coppard, was my first book for Thompson's Hawthorne House press. It was one of the [AIGA] fifty best books of the year.

In 1937, I proposed to Thompson a reprinting and publication of Clement C. Moore's *A Visit from Saint Nicholas*. It contained sixteen stipple drawings, printed in black with overtints of blue, red and yellow. It remains today one of the most sought-after items of my work.

The Song of Roland was printed by Thompson in 1938 for The Limited Editions Club of New York. It contains five decorations, hand colored, blue, red and yellow, each embellished with burnished gold. It remains as one of the truly fine books, with hand-set type, printed on French handmade paper. Its vellum gold-stamped binding makes it one of the rare publications from the Limited Editions Club.

Another book I enjoyed working on with Thompson, was *The House of the Seven Gables*, also for the Limited Editions Club. Again, superb craftsmanship throughout the book, illustrations again have that brooding, sometimes dramatic play, depicting the somber effects of good and evil. The illustrations are stipple board with overlays of somber brown, yellow, blue and green. The oval shapes, too, carry out the feeling of a dull, depressed, Nathaniel Hawthorne's New England life. It is a good companion to *The Scarlet Letter*, a book published by Random House in 1928, printed by the Grabhorns.

During the years of our friendship, many happy visits to the Thompson family come to mind. It was through Edmund Thompson that I met Daniel Updike at his Merrymount Press in Boston, Harold Hugo of the Meriden Gravure Co., and other Connecticut printers. Due to the Depression and little demand for fine printing, Thompson closed his shop and moved to Illinois, where after a few years of retirement he died.

Children: San Francisco Visit

TEISER: You mentioned that your children came back to San Francisco with you on a visit. You have told about your daughter but not about your son. Would you give us his name and when he was born, and also your daughter's date of birth?

ANGELO: My son Peter was born on August 1st, 1934, in Bronxville, Westchester County, New York, almost a year after our arrival on the East Coast.

My daughter Valdine was born in San Francisco, St. Francis Hospital, March 1st, 1929. We were living in Sausalito in the house I had built there, and I remember vividly the frantic drive down the hill to the Sausalito ferry in my Stutz Bearcat. As luck would have it, we were on our way almost immediately after we boarded the ferry. Labor pains had started. It was about 11:00 p.m. when the ferry docked in San Francisco at the foot of Hyde Street. The Lord must have watched over us. I raced the car frantically up and down the hilly streets of San Francisco, breaking all traffic rules. Meanwhile my wife lay back against the seat, breathing heavily. "Be careful. Don't drive so fast." Then she groaned, "Oh! Oh! It's coming!"

"Hold everything!" I shouted. "We're here."

We had arrived just in time for an emergency delivery.

I sat in a deserted waiting room going over a few prayers, bewildered by anxiety, wondering about the state of my wife, when the doctor came to congratulate me. "You are the father of a fine baby daughter," he said. "You may go in and see her now."

I'll never forget that day. A porter who had seen me drive into the hospital driveway came to inform me that I had, in the rush to get my wife into the hospital, left the motor of the car running. "It's a Stutz, ain't it?" I told him that it was a Stutz Bearcat—with a special body.

"Wow!" he said, "I sure wish I had one of them!"

That night I didn't drive back to Sausalito. Instead I drove to Fillmore Street to visit my friend Charles Barrett, in his new studio, where I found him still at work in his darkroom. He was delighted to hear the news and offered me a plate of leftover clam chowder, which I accepted.

It was three o'clock in the morning, after several discussions concerning the future welfare of my newborn daughter, that I fell asleep on a couch. His words kept ringing in my ears. "Remember. Don't forget. I want to be the first to photograph your daughter."

To this day I still have many photographs this kind and generous friend took of me and my family.

In the year 1936 I made my first trip back to San Francisco, and renewed old acquaintances. Two weeks were spent in Antioch, where my mother overfed and overloved us and our children. I spent considerable time fishing, and on our return to San Francisco resumed our friendship with our many friends there.

The highlight party of our visit was held at the home of George and Katherine Burkhardt. Though the Depression and Prohibition* were well underway, there seemed no indication of lack because of either. We had long visits with the Grabhorns. Another gathering of friends was held at the home of Rudi Blesh, who later became known in jazz music and modern art. He wrote *Shining Trumpets* and *Modern Art USA*, published by Knopf.

*Prohibition had ended in December 1933 but certain psychological aspects of it lingered.



Maxine Grimm Angelo and Valenti Angelo with their daughter, Valdine.

1929

The Gelbers were glad to have us back in San Francisco. It was in Gelber and Lilienthal's bookstore and gallery that the original illustrations for Burton's Arabian Nights tales—all 1001—were exhibited. The *Chronicle*, I recall, gave the show a full-page illustrated article. Before we realized it, it was time to return to the East Coast, and back to work.

TEISER: After you started doing work for Macy, did you stop doing jackets?

ANGELO: During the period I worked for the Limited Editions Club I continued to accept commissions for jackets, illustrations, posters and some package designs. One in particular was work for Richard Hudnut cosmetics. The work was very interesting in that many of the old containers of cosmetics were redesigned in styles that were more in keeping with modern times.

It was not my first attempt at the art of packaging. I had executed, during the twenties when I was employed at the Commercial Art and Engraving Co., some ultramodern, or Art Nouveau examples suited for candy boxes, which were sold to the famous Blum's candy stores. My wife, who studied with Schaeffer, executed a number of designs also.

*The Golden Cross Press and
The Press of Valenti Angelo*

TEISER: How did you happen to establish the Golden Cross Press?

ANGELO: The Golden Cross Press was established in Bronxville, New York, in 1935. It was my intention to publish a series of religious titles—excerpts from the Holy Bible. The series was designed and illustrated by me—the printing to be commissioned to outstanding printers such as Edmund Thompson of Hawthorne House and Peter Beilenson of the Walpole Printing Office. Philip C. Duschnes, a New York book dealer, was the distributor for the press. I was the sole proprietor. Since the distributor took fifty percent of the sales, the

operation was unprofitable and the idea of the Golden Cross Press was abandoned.

TEISER: Would you say a little about the Golden Cross printers: Edmund Thompson, Walter Emerson, the Walpole Printing Office, and the Timothy Press, which printed the Maurice Hewlett book?

ANGELO: Edmund Thompson was considered one of the best among the young printers on the East Coast.

Walter Emerson was a pressman for Peter Beilenson's The Walpole Printing Office. And a very able craftsman, too. It was in 1936 that he printed a small Christmas book— *The Second Chapter from the Gospel According to Saint Matthew* —an excellent job of printing.

The Timothy Press of Harold Hugo printed the Charles Reade booklet, an excerpt from his *Cloister and the Hearth, Come Over and Stay Till Doomsday*.

Since I had had the good fortune of reading Maurice Hewlett's *The Road in Tuscany*, for extensive history of hill towns throughout Tuscany, I was naturally interested in publishing some of his work. One of my favorites being *Quattrocentisteria*, a love tale about Sandro Botticelli and Simmonetta which takes place in fourteenth century Florence. The book was printed for me by Peter Beilensen.

TEISER: Was *Christmas, A Fragment* the first or second book you wrote?

ANGELO: *Christmas, A Fragment* was written Christmas Day, 1939, after I had finished writing *Nino*, my first book for children. It is meant to signify the loneliness of man in a large American city.

TEISER: Was *Concerning a Battle in Washington Square* the first book you wrote about New York?

ANGELO: *A Battle in Washington Square* is the first book I wrote about New York. The story takes place during the Christmas festivities—a contest between two groups of boys each trying to out-snowball the other. There seemed something unholy about the affair that



THE GOLDEN CROSS PRESS
was established in 1935, by Valenti Angelo. The imprint
indicates items printed by other presses.

**The Book of Esther. King James Version. Printed by
Edmund Thompson, Windham, Connecticut, 1935. 2 line
drawings and initials hand illuminated in blue and gold.**

**The Sermon on the Mount. King James Version. Print-
ed by Edmund Thompson, Windham, Connecticut, 1935.
3 initials and title page hand illuminated in red, blue and
gold. Special edition for Columbiad Club.**

**Quattrocentisteria, by Maurice Hewlett. Printed at the
Walpole Printing Office, Mount Vernon, New York,
1937. 5 line drawings, and initials, illuminated in red,
blue and gold. AICA.**

prompted me to write into it the symbols of a real conflict between two enemies—which is finally climaxed by the sound of chimes from the Church of Our Lady of Pompei, on nearby Bleecker Street.

TEISER: What kind of control did you exert over production of these books?

ANGELO: It was my purpose to issue titles of interest to book collectors. Each book or broadside to be designed, hand set type, hand printed with decorations where necessary, and with initial letters in gold, and often hand bound by the artist.

TEISER: How did you dispose of the books—give them, sell them?

ANGELO: Some of the books were sold to dealers, some were given as gifts to friends. Most of the Golden Cross books were distributed by Philip C. Duschnes. The Golden Cross Press proved to be a very interesting enterprise—but not a very profitable one. I can safely say I lost money, but it was an interesting experience.

TEISER: Why did you stop publishing under this imprint?

ANGELO: My primary idea for the Golden Cross Press was to issue religious excerpts from the Bible. When I began to issue the work of modern authors, the name of the press was changed to The Press of Valenti Angelo.

TEISER: Concerning The Press of Valenti Angelo: How many books were published between 1949 through 1975? Are there more since?

ANGELO: Twenty-seven books were printed under the imprint of The Press of Valenti Angelo, two of which were printed in San Francisco in 1975—none since.

TEISER: How did you happen to start this press? Was it conceived as a completely one-man job?

ANGELO: In 1949 I acquired a large handpress on which I produced some woodcuts and lino cuts in color. I also purchased a small Albion press from Bruce Rogers. Everything that was printed on these presses was a one-man job.

TEISER: Would you describe your Bronxville press physically—and the equipment you had?

ANGELO: The large handpress had a printing area of 17" by 26". It was made in Chicago at the turn of the century by Carl Shniewend company. I believe it was generally used in newspaper offices, and rather clumsy in design, unlike the beautiful English Albion presses. The Bruce Rogers press was a little gem. It was fine for small booklets and Christmas cards, et cetera. I still have it and cherish it. I also had a Poco proof press.

Along with the large press which I acquired from a printer member of The Typophiles of New York, one Frank Rea Sloane, [was] included a large assortment of type, Caslon in two sizes, some Goudy type and a large assortment of ornaments and lock-up wooden furniture. It was a good start, and I added considerable type such as Lutetia in three sizes, Eric Gill's Perpetua in two sizes, and a large assortment of cap letters.

My studio, which was used solely for writing, painting, illustrating and sculpturing, soon took on the appearance of a printing shop, and printing took up a great deal of my time. While working for the Grabhorns, I had always wanted a press. Soon my occupations—illustrating, designing, intervals of painting and sculpting—and now with printing I had time for little else. However, being so occupied, I was experiencing the happiest time of my life.

TEISER: How did you choose the things to print—on the basis partly of the illustrations that could be made for them?

ANGELO: Yes. Many of the texts were chosen because of the possibility of decorations to enhance their appearance.

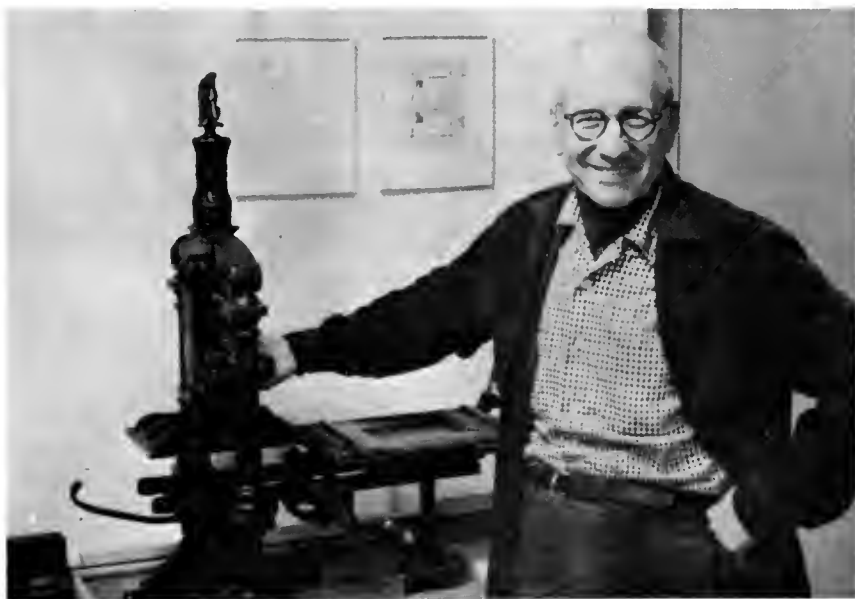


Valenti Angelo setting type.
1949



Valenti Angelo at work
on illustrations for his
book, The Candy Basket.

1960



Valenti Angelo and his
Albion hand press,
Bronxville, New York.
1965

TEISER: It occurs to me to ask, have you *always* read a great deal?

ANGELO: After only three years of schooling in America, I became an avid reader, and remain so to this day.

TEISER: Many of the books you printed are religious. Do you consider yourself a religious man? Formally or informally?

ANGELO: During my brief period in school in Italy, where the children were taught by the Franciscan monks, a considerable amount of religion became a part of my studies. Some of it remains to this day. I would say I am informally a religious man.

TEISER: Who bound your books?

ANGELO: *Quattrocentisteria*, *The Sermon on the Mount*, *The Book of Esther*, and a special edition of *The Psalms of David* were hand bound by Gerhard Gerlach. These were under the Golden Cross Press imprint. For The Press of Valenti Angelo he bound the following books: *The Book of Ruth*, *Hymns to Aphrodite*, poems of William Blake,* and *The Fiscal Hoboes* by [William] Saroyan.

All other books from my press were hand bound by myself.

TEISER: Of the books of the Valenti Angelo press, which were most satisfying to you and why? Would you tell a little about any of the books you would like to comment upon?

ANGELO: That is a difficult question to answer. However, I think *Hymns to Aphrodite* is one book I enjoyed doing because the classic subject matter more or less suggested the design, typography and decorations of the book. It is in every way a modern book.

The *Albert Camus* is another book whose design and decorations (portrait and initial) grew out of the text. The strong, black text seemed to me at the time to suggest the strength and character of Albert Camus

*A Selection of Verses

himself. The text, which Alfred Knopf gave me permission to reprint, was selected after my laryngectomy operation. The message it contained helped me toward a speedy recovery. I was attracted by the text of *Albert Camus, September 15th, 1937*, while reading his *Notebooks*. The brief essay deals with a difficult period in Camus' life while he lived in Florence.

William Blake's *Auguries of Innocence* and *The Court of the Printer's Guild*, by [W.] Loftus Hare, stand among my better made books. And there are others.

TEISER: Can you explain how you had time and energy to print and illustrate your own books, write books to be published by others, illustrate books for others, and continue your own fine art work during these years?

ANGELO: I can only attribute my outbursts of enthusiasm and energy to the many inherent desires to create beautiful things—among them books. It must be that Tuscan Renaissance spirit that keeps prodding me on from one artistic endeavor to another.

• I can safely say that in my life there has seldom been a dull moment.

Writing Children's Books

TEISER: You have mentioned in your "Autobiographical Story" that you were illustrating a children's book for Viking Press when you began writing your first book, *Nino*. Would you give some details?

ANGELO: *Roller Skates* by Ruth Sawyer is the first book for children that I illustrated. Why I was chosen to illustrate a story about a young girl living in New York City during the turn of the century is still a puzzle to me. Perhaps it was because of my reputation as a book illustrator, and the work I had done for the Grabhorn Press and the Limited Editions Club. It was awarded the Newbury Medal, 1937. It was also chosen as one of the best books of that year by the American Institute of Graphic Arts, which of course made me doubly happy.

TEISER: Had you told stories about your childhood, or other stories, to your own children?

ANGELO: During a period when my children were younger, story telling became almost an after-dinner ritual. My daughter, who was five years older than my son, seemed to be very inquisitive about my own childhood in Italy. That is how my first book, *Nino*, was finally written and published. It too was selected by the American Institute of Graphic Arts as a best book of the year. It was also a selection of the Junior Literary Guild, for distribution to its young readers.

TEISER: When you started writing *Nino*, did you have a book in mind? You wrote that you completed a 400-page manuscript in three months.

ANGELO: My first attempt at writing was indeed a very exciting experience for a third-grade graduate.

It was May Massee, editor of juvenile books at Viking Press, who encouraged me, and during many luncheon hours kept asking questions about my childhood in Tuscany. "Write everything down. And don't forget—you are writing these stories for children." Of course I felt flattered, and even dreamed that someday I may become known as an author.

After considerable writing and rewriting I had finished, during the course of three months, thirty-four chapters of the story of *Nino* —a total of about 400 pages.

Everybody at Viking liked the story. There were questions of course. "It's too long. It must be cut." And *Nino* was returned to the author for revision.

I performed a thorough surgical operation on little *Nino*. It took me about three weeks of cutting, rewriting and some sorrows and headaches, which included damning the publishers for not understanding my Italian temperament. However, the ordeal was well worth it. I learned a great deal about writing, especially through Margery Williams Bianco, to whom my manuscript had been given for final editing, and who later became one of my dearest friends. It was at her house that I met the famous Pamela Bianco, the well-known painter who had been a protege of Picasso.

Nino sure had growing pains, more than I dare mention. After fifty years the book is still in print, still giving joy to many young readers.

TEISER: Did you do the drawings after you completed the story?

ANGELO: The drawings for *Nino* were done after the manuscript was accepted. Drawing those pictures was like living my childhood all over again in that little village in the Tuscan hills. It was quite a trial for me to get the publisher to have the illustrations printed in a grey-green that gives the book a feeling of harmony.

TEISER: Did you start soon then on your second book, *Golden Gate*? Was it, too, mainly autobiographical?

ANGELO: Since the story of *Nino* deals with his life in Italy, it seemed quite natural that an extension of *Nino* be written of his first year in America. In the sequel, *Golden Gate*, also autobiographical, the story leads Nino into a better understanding of the American way of life. It was a Junior Guild selection.

Golden Gate was reprinted in its entirety in a new edition, titled *The Italian-American Experience*, published by Arno Press, a New York Times Company, New York, in 1975. It was the only juvenile book to be selected for inclusion in a thirty-nine volume set, each volume written by a different author.

TEISER: How did you happen to locate *Paradise Valley* in Nevada? Had you been in this kind of place?

ANGELO: *Paradise Valley* was inspired by memories of a family of Mexican railroad repair workers who lived in two railroad cabooses parked on a siding on the outskirts of Antioch.

I became acquainted with Pedro, a fourteen-year-old, who had lived in Nevada and told me of his adventures there and especially those of his Uncle Pio who had a sheep ranch in Nevada.

During trips to California from New York in the forties, I was entranced by the Nevada desert and especially the territory around and near Elko, Nevada. The scenery left deep impressions on my mind, so much so that it became the setting for *Paradise Valley*, my third book for Viking Press. Some reality exists in the story, though much of it is pure invention.

TEISER: Who was M. M. to whom you dedicated the book?

ANGELO: *Paradise Valley* was dedicated to my editor at Viking Press. May Massee was one of the greatest editors I have known. She was awarded the Gold Medal of the American Institute of Graphic Arts—the only woman to receive the award.

TEISER: Would you check down the list of the rest of your children's books and comment upon some of them?

ANGELO: *The Rooster Club* consists of three short stories. All of these deal with my boyhood as a member of the Boy Scouts of America. The same group of boys appear in each story. *Mount Diablo* deals with the group's adventures in climbing the mountains, encounters with wild life—and trying to cook beans at high altitude without success, and general good fellowship among the group of scouts. Another Junior Guild selection was *The Bells of Bleecker Street*. The first time I saw this street was back in 1905. I had arrived from Italy en route to California. For a short time we lived in the house of a friend. It was thirty-eight years later that I saw the street again. Here again was Little Italy as I remembered it. I had been haunting the street for years, making notes, listening to the vendors standing beside their pushcarts, the trickle of music from some window above the street, and the many songs of the church bells from Our Lady of Pompei.

Some of the characters are imaginary, but incidents sprinkled throughout the story are true. Father Benino, Professor Dante the music teacher, and many others are much-loved characters in any Italian quarter.

The Marble Fountain is the story of two war orphans, Andrea and Piccolo, whose father and mother were killed during an air raid. Letters I received during the war years from friends in Italy were helpful in some of the descriptive narrative of the story. It is indirectly the story of regeneration. The orphans and their donkey travel to a village where their aunt and uncle become in many ways the boys' new parents. It is a story in which unheard-of miracles truly take place. Whatever the village had suffered, it is a place of love and hope and faith—a place where children, animals and old people live together in happy companionship.

Angelino and the Barefoot Saint is more of a picture book. It tells of a little boy's faith and belief in miracles. And a miracle really occurs on Christmas when the statue of St. Francis in the church garden, whose face seemed sad, was brightened with a smile by an act that only Angelino could think of performing on Christmas Eve.

The story is illustrated with lithographs that were printed in a soft blue.

TEISER: Did you find a publisher's editor to be of help?

ANGELO: I believe editors are essential to writers of stories. There are moments when the writer becomes so engrossed in the writing of a story that much is often left unsaid. It is amazing how much an editor can change the meaning of a sentence. My editor, May Massee, often showed me that a pencil often became an instrument of improvement. "Rewrite it! For a graduate from a third-grade class you are doing just fine." Punctuation marks were my worst enemy.

After the death of May Massee, Annis Duff became my new editor. She was the mother of two children. She knew the ins and outs of each one's character.

I have been often told that my stories are about the common people who are content to live their daily lives without ambition to seek a higher purpose in life. "Why don't you write stories that will inspire our children to higher things in life? Children don't like to read about the common people."

Children don't know any better. I have been brought up by common people—if one must use the word, "common." In a sense I believe all people are common.

TEISER: Christmas appears in many of your books as a happy holiday, sometimes as the climax of the story. Do you still feel that Christmas is a factor in the yearly round of human events that somehow has a purifying effect upon people? (Or am I making too much of this point?)

ANGELO: In some of my books I have found some holidays, such as Christmas and Easter, essential to enhance the spirit of joy and family reunions. I feel that Christmas is an important factor in the yearly rounds of human events. It does have a purifying effect on people, mainly because of a world so infested with commercialism and lack of communion and the spirit of faith. Amen.

TEISER: Have you stopped writing children's books?

ANGELO: I haven't stopped writing children's books. There are two stories which I am planning to complete in 1979.

TEISER: Are many of your books for children still in print?

ANGELO: According to my royalties statements, a few of my books are still in print.

Return to San Francisco

TEISER: How did you happen to return to San Francisco?

ANGELO: After the sudden death of my wife on February 11, 1971, a nine-room house and studio proved too much for me to take care of. After a trip to Italy and San Francisco, I decided to sell the property and make my home in San Francisco and begin life anew.

TEISER: When did you return here?

ANGELO: I returned to San Francisco in September 1974, after the sale of my property.

TEISER: The last major book in which you were involved was your bibliography. Would you tell a little of the circumstances of that publication?

ANGELO: The last major work in which I became involved was printed by the Arion Press. It was a publication for The Book Club of California, and is a bibliography of my work, representing a period of fifty years as "Artist, Author, Illustrator, Printer." I recall the enthusiasm of the printer and grand plans to make the work a masterpiece of bookmaking. Promises were made that facsimiles of my work would be printed in full color. As it turned out, important examples that should have had color were printed in black and white, and I felt these were not representative of my work. For me the entire process became a discouraging ordeal. There was little cooperation between artist and printer. The ordeal that resulted still haunts me whenever I look through this unfinished book.

A well-known printer, on reviewing the book, remarked, "It's unfortunate that the book wasn't completed as planned."

TEISER: What are you working on now?

ANGELO: I am working on a more detailed and comprehensive story of my life, a sort of memoir.

Transcriber: Lisa Esherick

Appendix One

Valenti Angelo—Artist, Author, Illustrator and Printer—
an Exhibition of His Work—San Francisco Public Library Rotunda—
September and October 1975. Exhibition commentary by Anne Englund.

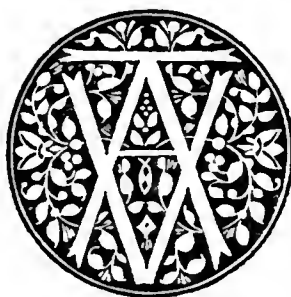
VALENTI ANGELO

ARTIST, AUTHOR, ILLUSTRATOR & PRINTER

AN EXHIBITION OF HIS WORK

SAN FRANCISCO PUBLIC LIBRARY ROTUNDA

September and October 1975



*The Friends of the San Francisco Public Library
invite you to a reception for Valenti Angelo on Sunday, September 7, 1975
from 3 to 5 pm in the Special Collections Department. Dr. James D. Hart
will introduce Mr. Angelo and discuss his varied achievements at 4 pm.*

VALENTI ANGELO is the Renaissance artist reborn, not only in the exquisite style and taste which characterize his work, but also in the broad scope of his creative talent. His artistic achievements have included work in fields as varied as writing, book illustration and illumination, printing, printmaking, painting and sculpture. Mr. Angelo traces his interest and first experiments in art back to his early childhood in a small Italian village in Tuscany, where he was born in 1897. Visiting the neighboring cities of Florence, Padua, Ravenna and Assisi, he was struck with the beauty of the great paintings and sculpture. One event in particular remains vivid in his memory as having awakened him to the potential beauty of books. He was seven years old at the time, going to a school run by an old monk in a monastery on a hilltop above his home. One morning he saw his teacher sitting outside on a bench, reading a book that seemed to sparkle in the sunlight. "When I reached him, I found that he was reading a book the like of which I had never seen before, a fifteenth century manuscript Book of Hours, entirely written and decorated by hand. As he turned the pages, each one was em-

bellished with pictures in vivid colors and burnished gold. . . . This was a book that I think helped to influence the course of events during my later years. I thought it was the most beautiful book in the world. To me it still is."

In 1905, the Angelo family moved to the United States, where they settled in Antioch, California. After a brief formal education and work in many of the local factories, Valenti Angelo came to San Francisco to pursue his increasing interest in art. His first job was as a janitor for three buildings on California Street between Polk and Van Ness. As luck would have it, one of these was a studio building housing many artists and writers as well as an art school taught by Arthur Best. Learning of his interest in art, Best invited him to visit his classes and hired him as an occasional model. Angelo also met the noted photographer Charles Barrett in the building, where he had by then rented a small studio for himself. It was through Barrett's support and guidance that Angelo compiled a portfolio of his work that convinced Harry Blatchly of the Commercial Art & Engraving Co. to hire him as the firm's only apprentice. Learning the art of lettering and woodcutting, retouching photographs and designing school yearbooks as he went along, Angelo was, within 2½ years, assistant to the art director and the head of a new department in charge of the rapidly expanding college annual business. It was at that time, in 1926, that Charles Barrett took him to a local exhibit of books printed by the Grabhorn Press and then arranged for him to meet the Grabhorn brothers. The Grabhorns, who were already acquainted with Angelo's paintings, were about to print *The Letter of Amerigo Vespucci* for the Book Club of California, and felt that the Italianate style of Angelo's work would be perfect for the book's illustration. For Angelo, this was an opportunity to work with printers who were gaining national renown for their beautiful work in printing books. Although the Grabhorns could offer him only about one-fifth his salary at Commercial Art & Engraving, Angelo took the job, and for the first time "found real and thorough joy in my work." To supplement the retainer paid him by the Grabhorns, Angelo began to do free-lance advertising work as well. Among his own accounts were such San Francisco firms as Wells Fargo, Livingston's and, through his friend Dashiell Hammett, Samuel's Jewelers.

Valenti Angelo worked some seven years with the Grabhorns, between 1926 and 1933. In addition to mastering such techniques of book illustration as pen and ink, scratchboard, lithography, woodcut and the difficult art of illumination, he learned every step of the printing process as well. During this period, his designs and illustrations appeared in over forty books and numerous ephemeral pieces. His very first attempt at book illustration, the 1926 *Letter of Amerigo Vespucci*, earned the country's highest award for book design, the gold medal of the American Institute of Graphic Arts. Nineteen other Grabhorn books on which he worked were selected by that Insti-

tute to be among the Fifty Books of the Year. One of the most notable of these was the folio edition of Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*, published by Random House in 1930. Angelo experimented with different initials and illustrations for nine long months before the decision was reached to use one of his early ideas—38 simple linear woodcuts that complement the rugged strength of Whitman's poetry. Another outstanding example of Angelo's work for the Grabhorns is the 1928 *Voiage and Travaile of Sir John Maundevile*, also published by Random House. Angelo designed 31 illustrations and hand-illuminated the paragraph marks and 34 decorative initials in each of the 150 copies printed of this remarkable production.

One effect of the depression was to reduce the demand for the kinds of books Angelo had been illustrating for the Grabhorns. By 1933, he was devoting most of his time to painting, for exhibitions in local galleries and by commission for such patrons as Sherwood Anderson. When the Gump's Gallery arranged with the well-known art critic Thomas Craven to ship one of his exhibitions to the Ferrigal Galleries in New York, Angelo decided to make the move to New York himself. For a while, finding employment as an artist in New York proved as difficult as in San Francisco. After three months of continued search for work among book publishers, Angelo decided to see George Macy, the director of the Limited Editions Club. Macy was looking for new talent and commissioned him on the spot to produce 1001 illustrations for the Club's publication of Burton's *Arabian Nights Tale*. Other such commissions from Macy kept him working regularly for the next eight to ten years. Over a 34-year period, he illustrated some fifteen books for the Club, many with hand-illumination requiring an enormous amount of work since there were 1500 copies in each edition.

With Limited Editions Club commissions providing a fairly steady flow of work and income, Angelo continued to pursue other artistic endeavors. In addition to his own painting and sculpture, he accepted commissions for book illustrations from printers like Peter Beilenson, who was just beginning to produce his Peter Pauper Press books. In 1935, Angelo assumed the role of publisher himself. Under the imprint of the Golden Cross Press, he designed, illustrated and hand-illuminated a beautiful series of books printed by some of the country's finest presses. Finally, in 1949, Angelo acquired his own press and began to produce books entirely of his own making, from design and illustration to printing and binding. One of the most sought-after imprints of the Press of Valenti Angelo continues to be the bibliography of his work, *Valenti Angelo—Author, Illustrator, Printer*, published in 1970 in an extremely small edition of 55 copies.

Angelo's work in New York as printer and book illustrator was fully as prodigious and successful as that done earlier in San Francisco. Thirty of the books with which he

was associated during this period were among the AIGA lists of the Fifty Books of the Year. Norman Kent, in reviewing Angelo's varied work in this field, defined its predominant character as a "strong, primitive Italianate quality . . . That quality or character is *restraint*. Angelo's work in book decoration is distinguished by its appropriateness—by the fact his selected medium and the type always appear 'made for each other.'"

It was in 1937 that Valenti Angelo first embarked on his career as an author. He was illustrating Ruth Sawyer's *Roller Skates* for Viking Press when the editor of the Viking children's books, May Massee, suggested he try writing down some of his own experiences as a child in Italy. The result, three months later, was *Nino*, the first of seventeen children's books he has both written and illustrated to date. The enduring quality of Angelo's books is attested by the fact that the Arno Press Division of the New York Times has just this year reprinted his second book, *Golden Gate* (1939), as part of its series on the Italian-American experience. It was the only juvenile book chosen to be among the 39-volume series dealing with Italian immigrants in America. In her assessment of Angelo's achievement, Annis Duff, Editor of Viking Junior Books, remarked, "Valenti Angelo, the artist and writer, is very much all-of-a-piece with Valenti Angelo, the man; and it is not surprising that truth, gentleness, humor and kindness should be essential qualities in his books. Perhaps it is his own simplicity—a wise and mellow appreciation of what makes living rich and serene—that gives Valenti Angelo's work for children its peculiar value."

Just one year ago this September, Valenti Angelo returned at last to San Francisco. He has already set up his small press in his Nob Hill apartment and printed *The Court of the Printers' Guild*, a lovely small book with hand-illuminated initials and title-page illustration. He is presently involved in planning an enlarged and updated folio edition of his bibliography which will be printed by Andrew Hoyem and published by the Book Club of California in December 1976, marking the 50th anniversary of his career as a book illustrator.

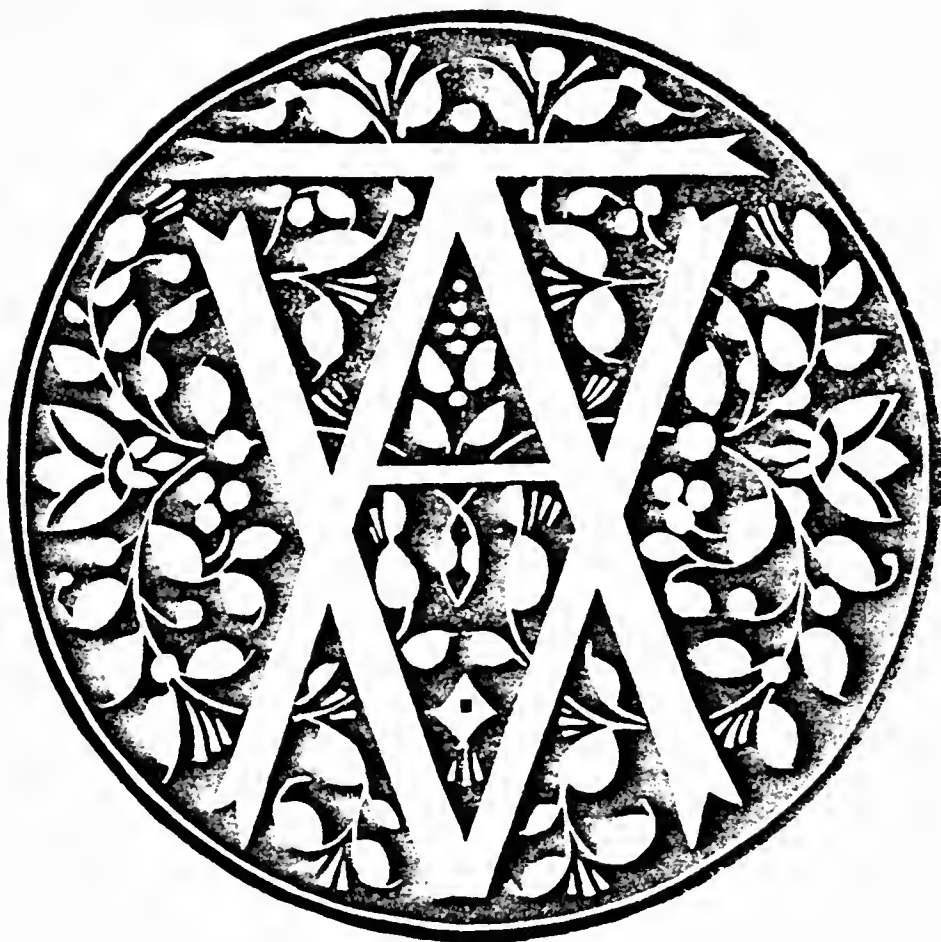
San Francisco is fortunate indeed to have this gifted artist back again. He, as well as his work, prove an inspiration to all artists and book lovers. Sherwood Anderson once described the spirit and effect of Angelo's painting for an exhibition here. His remarks apply equally well to all aspects of Angelo's creativity, as author, artist and printer:

"I think there is a power of feeling in these paintings, and that power goes out of them into a room and returns into them. I think we Americans need this kind of painting and this kind of painter. I think we need such paintings in our houses. They are reaching for some lost dignity in man and in reaching, help bring it back."

Anne Englund

Appendix Two

Invitation to reception in honor of Valenti Angelo's birthday,
held at San Francisco Public Library,
San Francisco, June 23, 1977



VALENTI ANGELO

The Friends of
VALENTI ANGELO

cordially invite you to a reception

in honor of his

80TH BIRTHDAY

Thursday, June 23, 1977, 5 - 7 p.m.

San Francisco Public Library, San Francisco

Special Collections Department

Third Floor

Appendix Three

VALENTI ANGELO. List of group and one man
shows exhibiting works of Valenti Angelo

VALENTI ANGELO

Author, Painter, Sculptor, Printmaker

Exhibited work in the following group shows and one man shows:

Palace Legion of Honor, San Francisco (painting)

DeYoung Museum, San Francisco (sculpture)

Galerie Beaux Arts, San Francisco

San Francisco Art Center

Vickery Atkins & Torrey Galleries, San Francisco

The Gump Galleries, San Francisco

Dalzell-Hatfield Galleries, Los Angeles

Pasadena Art Institute

National Academy, New York

Allied Arts, New York

Salmagundi Club, New York

Ferrigal Galleries, New York

Pennsylvania Academy of Art

Metropolitan Museum of Art (International Show)

Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. (Purchase Award)

Annual Print Shows, Pennell Collection, Washington, D.C.

New York Public Library (Purchase Award)

San Francisco Public Library

Brooklyn Public Library

Has paintings, sculpture, and prints in many private collections throughout the United States.

Appendix Four

Newspaper article, "Half a Century of Beauty,"
San Francisco Chronicle, February 15, 1977

EVOLUTIONS: TWO ARTISTS

By Joseph Torchia

Valenti Angelo is 79 and looking back. Frank Holbrook is 29 and looking ahead. Both men are artists. Both live in San Francisco. Both have a story to tell.

The same story, but different — from opposite ends of a telescope.

Valenti Angelo has been called "the Renaissance artist reborn." He's bald, wrinkled, widowed, still painting and writing and "making beautiful books" — books that he prints himself, binds himself, illustrates and hand-illuminates himself.

Photographer Ansel Adams has called Angelo's work "truly timeless." Author Sherwood Anderson once said his paintings "are reaching for some lost dignity in man — and in reaching, help bring it back."

Frank Holbrook has had no such reviews. Few

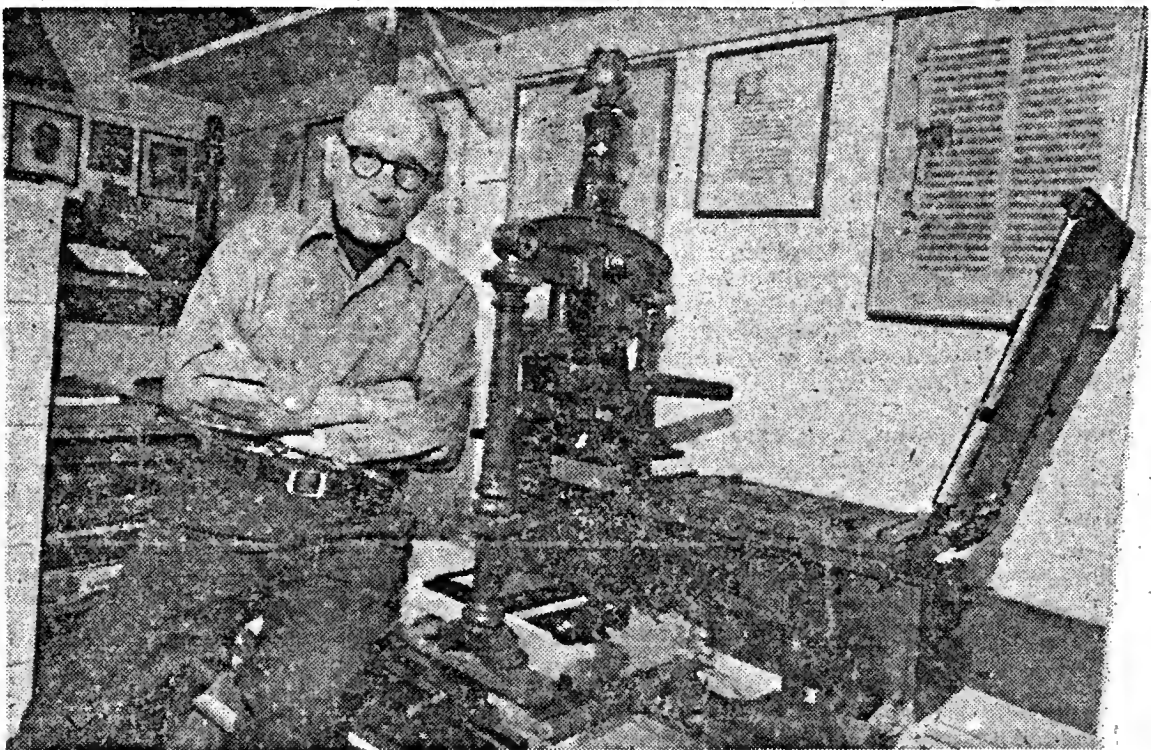
people have seen his paintings. He's young, determined to succeed on his own terms, willing to go without, never quite knowing where the rent money will come from, but knowing it will — it has to. Money can't stop him. Nothing can.

"I have something to say," he says. "My colors are my vocabulary."

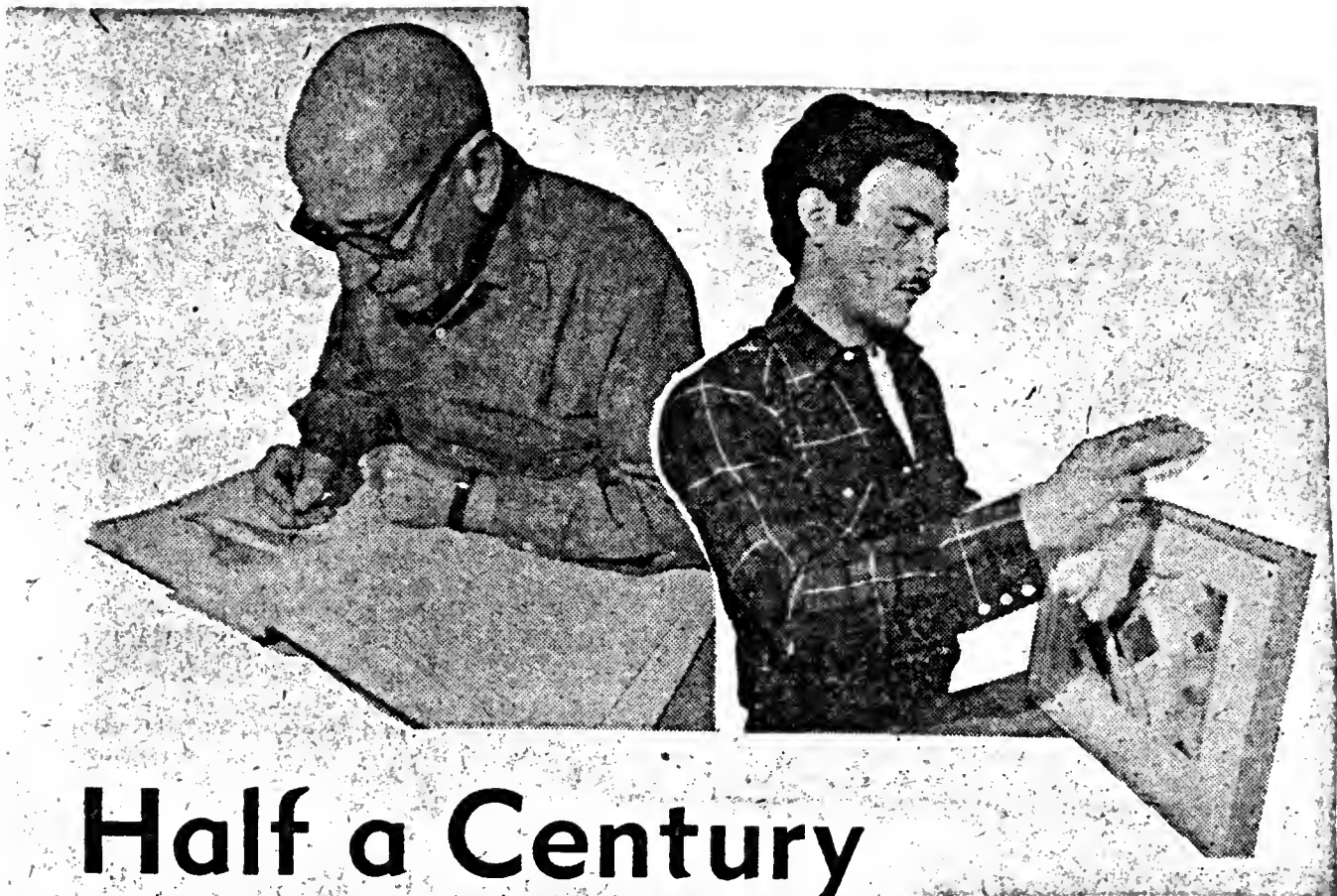
Angelo lives on Nob Hill and Holbrook lives in Noe Valley. Their lives and their art are as different as their neighborhoods. They have never met each other and probably never will.

Yet there is something that ties them together, something about the way they see and feel — and think and dream. There's something about the way they pull out their passions and put them on paper or canvas, exposing them like wounds, leaving them open for the world to see.

Here are their separate — yet together — stories.



Photos by Vince Maggiora



Half a Century Of Beauty

Valenti Angelo has a printing press that was built in 1905, a framed page from Genesis that was printed in 1609, a page from Psalms that was hand-written in the 14th century.

He lives alone in a small apartment across from Grace Cathedral. He talks with muscles most people never use. He lost his vocal cords because of cancer and his voice is strained and broken — and comes direct from deep inside.

On one wall is a painting of the place he was born — convulsions of color from his childhood. On another wall is a sculpture of his wife when she was young — long before their 49-year marriage was destroyed by diabetes. On his lap is a book he illustrated a half-century ago — today worth thousands of dollars.

All around him are pages from the past — the story of an artist that began one morning in 1904, in the sunlight.

He was seven years old then and going to a school run by an old monk in the Italian province of Tuscany. That morning he saw his teacher sitting outside on a bench, reading a book that “seemed to sparkle in the sunlight.”

He was spellbound.

It was a 15th-century manuscript entirely written and decorated by hand. Each page was embellished with pictures in dazzling colors and burnished gold. He thought it was the most beautiful book in the world.

“To me it will always be the most beautiful book in the world.”

Two years later he was in California living near a paper mill in Antioch. At first the mill yard was stacked with illustrated catalogs and Police Gazettes — his introduction to America.

Then suddenly the ground shook in San Francisco and thou-

sands of books magically appeared in the mill yard — rubble of the Great Earthquake. Some were charred. Some were water-stained or torn. Others were in perfect condition.

He discovered Shakespeare and Thackeray and pictures and words and visions and dreams.

“There is something about a book, any kind of book, that cries to be picked up and opened by young or old,” he says. “There’s something almost sacred about the ritual of opening a book.”

Today, at 79, Valenti Angelo is still pursued by a recurring dream — a dream where “I climb the fence to the mill yard, again rummage among the books and there find my golden book — the book that sparkled.”

Today he has almost 300 books — many of them hand-illuminated in 23-karat gold, most of them printed on fine parchment in extremely limited editions, all of them bearing the signature of Valenti Angelo: artist, author, illustrator, printer.

These are the kinds of books that can only be found in private collections and rare book libraries.



The identifying signature on Angelo's books

These are books like "The Voyage and Travail of Sir John Maundeville," printed in Old English with 31 drawings and 34 initials from the hand of Valenti Angelo — and only 150 copies in existence.

These are books by Walt Whitman, William Shakespeare, Nathaniel Hawthorne, St. Francis of Assisi, Amerigo Vespucci — and hundreds of others. These are the words of other men as seen through the pen of Valenti Angelo — a man who had to quit school in the third grade and go to work in the fields.

"My work represents a period in book-making that will never happen again," he says today. "It represents an era when people worked with their hands and their souls — not cameras and computers."

Angelo's artistic career began right here, in San Francisco, in 1926, when he went to work for the Grabhorn Brothers: two men dedicated to one goal — "the making of beautiful books."

Before that he had worked as a janitor and studied at the San Francisco Art School, situated where the Mark Hopkins Hotel is today. Then he landed a job as an engraver and from there went on to design college yearbooks.

The Grabhorns offered Angelo one-fifth the salary he was making as a designer of college annuals and Angelo surprised everyone but himself by promptly accepting. The first book he illustrated for them, "The Letter of Amerigo Vespucci," won the country's highest award for book design — the gold medal of the American Institute of Graphic Arts.

From then it was one book after another — one award after another. Gradually he mastered the techniques of pen and ink, scratchboard, lithography, woodcut and the difficult art of illumination. At last he found "real and thorough joy" in his work.

Then came the Great Depression and Angelo found himself with a young wife and two children — and no work. So he headed for New York — "the great city" — and there he discovered the Limited Editions Club, which kept him busy

for the next 34 years.

His first work for the club was Burton's "Arabian Nights Tales," which called for 1001 illustrations in 1500 copies of the book.

And then came "The Song of Songs Which Is Solomon's," which required hand-painting in 23-karat gold — in 20,000 copies of the book.

'I've got a lot more to do'

Angelo remembers his wife and his family and himself working together for months, struggling to complete this "golden task."

In 1937 Angelo decided to try his hand at writing and produced a book called "Nino" — the first of 17 children's books he has written and illustrated to date.

And all this time he had also been busy with sculpture and paintings — colorful, explosive paintings that prompted Sherwood Anderson to say: "I think there is a power of feeling in these paintings ... that goes out of them into a room and

returns into them. I think we Americans need this kind of painting and this kind of painter."

Today Angelo is still painting and sculpting, still making his own beautiful books — not for a printer, but on his own printing press, in his own Nob Hill apartment.

He left New York two years ago, his wife dead, his children grown, his vein still flowing with a 23-carat love of beautiful books.

"I began to hear footsteps in New York," he says today. "My wife's footsteps — still walking around in my memory. I realized there wasn't much left for me there. I realized I had to return to the place I started."

He talks quickly and excitedly sometimes — yet his voice still comes out broken. Sometimes he moves his mouth and no words come out at all.

Cancer. Glaucoma. Old age. The last years of a long life. His twisted voice contains it all — his words come out like brushstrokes, painting a portrait of an artist alive.

"Today I am old. Today students come up to me and ask for advice, for help, for suggestions on how to 'make it' as an artist.

"I tell them that an artist never 'makes it' — that he can only be true to himself, whether others recognize it or not. I tell them that the only thing that really matters is what's here, in your heart. And here, in your head. And here, in your hands.

"There's always a 'golden book' in front of you," he says. "There's always something greater, more beautiful to do.

"And if you think you've made it, you'll never make it."

Suddenly he smiles, remembering Walt Whitman's "Leaves of Grass," published in 1930. He remembers experimenting for nine months, trying to come up with illustrations "worthy of a great work of art."

"How do you illustrate words so pure, so powerful, so faultless that they seem to breathe a life of their own?" he asks. "How do you illustrate perfection?"

He pauses. He smiles wider. He bends over to answer his own question. His mouth opens wide, as if a storm is about to leap out. Then one fragile word:

"Simply."

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